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SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE

By ARNOLD BENNETT

NOVELS

THE ROLL-CALL
THE PRETTY LADY
THE LION'S SHARE
THESE TWAIN
CLAYHANGER
HILDA LESSWAYS
THE OLD WIVES' TALE
DENRY THE AUDACIOUS
THE OLD ADAM
HELEN WITH THE HIGH HAND
THE MATADOR OF THE FIVE TOWNS
THE BOOK OF CARLOTTA
BURIED ALIVE
A GREAT MAN
LEONORA
WHOM GOD HATH JOINED
A MAN FROM THE NORTH
ANNA OF THE FIVE TOWNS
THE GLIMPSE
THE CITY OF PLEASURE
THE GRAND BABYLON HOTEL
HUGO
THE GATES OF WRATH

POCKET PHILOSOPHIES

SELF AND SELF-MANAGEMENT
THE AUTHOR'S CRAFT
MARRIED LIFE
FRIENDSHIP AND HAPPINESS
HOW TO LIVE ON 24 HOURS A DAY
THE HUMAN MACHINE
LITERARY TASTE
MENTAL EFFICIENCY

PLAYS

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MILESTONES

MISCELLANEOUS

PARIS NIGHTS
THE TRUTH ABOUT AN AUTHOR
LIBERTY!
OVER THERE: WAR SCENES

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY
NEW YORK

SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

*FOUNDED ON THE NOVEL OF
THE SAME NAME*

BY

ARNOLD BENNETT

Author of "Judith," "Clayhanger,"
"The Roll Call," "The Old Wives'
Tale," "The Title," etc.

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11

1883

1884

1885

CHARACTERS

CHARLOTTA PEEL

EMILIO DIAZ

FRANK ISPENLOVE

MARY ISPENLOVE, his wife

EMMELINE PALMER, Charlotta's secretary

SNAPE, Diaz's secretary

MRS. JOICEY

LOUISA BENBOW, her sister

LORD FRANCIS ALCAR

MRS. SARDIS

JOCELYN SARDIS, her daughter

ROSALIE

LÉONIE

A PARLOURMAID

SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE

ACT I

SCENE I

Mrs. Joicey's sitting-room on the first floor of her house in the Five Towns. Door L. [as one faces the footlights], and double doors back centre. The latter open into a bedroom. There is a great deal of furniture, all dating from the seventies: many and various chairs, sundry tables, a sofa, a canterbury, rugs, antimacassars, mats, wax flowers under glass domes, a gas chandelier, and a grand piano in walnut [with the keyboard towards the back wall]. Over the mantelpiece an extensive enlarged photograph of a middle-aged man, in a rosewood frame. The window is not shown. Although most of the furniture is ugly, the general aspect of the crowded room is picturesque rather than ugly. It is bright-coloured, and has the distinction of a bygone style.

TIME.—*Eleven o'clock at night. The chandelier is lighted.*

Mrs. Joicey and Louisa are talking together. A faint knocking is heard from the front door on the ground floor.

Mrs. Joicey. Bless us! Here they come! Now don't spill the lemonade. And do run down and open the door.

Louisa. Oh! [*Begins to remove her apron.*]

Mrs. Joicey. What are you taking that apron off for, Louisa?

Louisa. All the work's done. Why should I pretend to be a servant when I'm your sister?

Mrs. Joicey. Louisa, have I got to begin that all over again? A nice thing! As like as not Mr. Diaz would tell all his London friends that I can't afford a servant! I should never get another travelling concert party. It's cruel how things like that'll spread. It's just as much for your sake as mine. Don't I keep you? If I didn't I should be a lot better off than I am. Isn't as if I asked you to wear a cap as well. I don't.

Louisa. D'you know what he did as they went off to the concert?

Mrs. Joicey [*anxious about the door*]. Who did? Mr. Diaz?

Louisa. No, the secretary.

Mrs. Joicey. What did he do?

Louisa. In the passage he said—when he was telling me about the fowl for supper—"There's

a good girl," he said, and he patted me on the cheek. I never told you, but he patted my cheek, and so now you know.

Mrs. Joicey. Mr. Snape did?

Louisa. Yes, Mr. Snape did.

Mrs. Joicey. And what did you do?

Louisa. Well, I acted the parlourmaid. I always did want to go on the stage.

Mrs. Joicey. But what did you do?

Louisa. Don't I tell you I acted the regular parlourmaid? And thankful you ought to be. I just smiled.

Mrs. Joicey. Well I never!

Louisa [*in another tone*]. Somehow I couldn't help it. [*In her former tone.*] But when he'd gone I didn't like the look of it so much. I said to myself, If he does it again, he's going to do it to Miss Benbow, not to any parlourmaid, and then we shall know where we are, I said.

Mrs. Joicey. Louisa—[*another knock*]. Now put that apron on this minute and go and answer the door. [*With curt persuasiveness.*] Come!

Louisa [*hesitating*]. If I do, it's got to be understood that I'm going to answer the bell, if they ring up here, by myself, without you poking your nose in and asking, "Is the 'maid' looking after you properly, gentlemen?" like you did at teatime. And I'm going to turn the beds down, too.

Mrs. Joicey. Oh, well—if it's like that——

Louisa. Well it is, sister.

Mrs. Joicey. Very good!

[*Exit Louisa, L, putting on the apron.*]

[*Mrs. Joicey examines the table, and then the room. Perceiving that the portrait over the mantelpiece is crooked, she sets a chair, steps on it, and straightens the portrait.*]

Enter Mr. Snape.

Mrs. Joicey. Good evening, Mr. Snape. I hope the weather didn't interfere with the concert.

Snape. We played to capacity, Mrs. Joicey.

Mrs. Joicey. "Capacity?" What's that?

Snape. Never heard of it in this district before, I suppose. Capacity, madam, is—er—sardines.

Mrs. Joicey. Oh! I see!

Snape. I doubt if we ever played better, except perhaps once in St. Petersburg. Four encores given. Three refused. Personally I should have given three and refused four. But then Five Towns audiences are very warm, very warm.

Mrs. Joicey. Oh, we are! But we're very critical too. So they say.

Snape. Do they? Supper all ready? Where's the cold fowl? [*Looks at table.*]

Mrs. Joicey. The maid will bring it. Did Mr. Diaz come in with you?

Snape [*with low, precise, slow enunciation*].
Dee-az.

Mrs. Joicey. We call it Dyaz down here.

Snape. You would. You shouldn't. Now I want some cakes.

Mrs. Joicey. I can't get cakes now. All the shops are shut.

Snape. I must have cakes—[*lusciously*] sweet spongy ones, with jam in them.

Mrs. Joicey. But you distinctly told me that you and Mr. Diaz never took anything but cold fowl and some milk and a siphon of soda-water. [Enter *Louisa*.] Here *is* the fowl.

Snape [to *Louisa*]. What's your name? I don't think I caught it.

Louisa [*acting the parlourmaid*]. *Louisa*—sir.

Snape. Well, *Louisa*, I want some cakes for supper. Your mistress says she can't get any at this time of night. Can't *you*?

Louisa [*reflecting, as she deposits the fowl*]. There's the cold jam roly-poly. I might cut it into thin slices and sift some sugar on them.

Snape. *Louisa*, please go and sift some sugar on them. [Exit *Louisa*.]

Mrs. Joicey. I'd thought of the jam roly-poly myself, but I doubt you'll hardly care for it.

Snape. Never mind.

Mrs. Joicey. But I *do* mind.

Snape. I shouldn't. I shan't be here for supper myself.

Mrs. Joicey. Then you'll only want supper for one.

Snape. Mr. Diaz has a friend coming.

Mrs. Joicey [*assuming that what she says is so*]. Another gentleman.

Snape. Well—perhaps not exactly. A lady. They will be here in a moment.

Mrs. Joicey. Oh dear! Mr. Snape! I know the musical profession isn't what it was in my young married days. I never expected in those days to let rooms; but I've kept this house respectable and I mean to. You see that portrait there. That's the portrait of my husband. He invented the hire-purchase system for pianos and American organs. At least in this district. He was the best man that ever lived. I'm very sorry, but I can't have any carryings-on in this room for that portrait to see.

Snape [*after a pause*]. Take the portrait down.

Mrs. Joicey. I shall take down no portrait—and I don't care *who* Mr. Diaz is, if you understand what I mean.

Snape. Quite—quite. But the lady is a pupil.

Mrs. Joicey [*brightening*]. Oh! If it's a pupil—! I was quite used to pupils in my married days. My husband was always considered the best teacher of the pianoforte, American organ, and clarionet in this district. *The Staffordshire Advertiser* called him *facile princeps*. He

once played a duet with Rubinstein on that very piano. That was the day Rubinstein gave a concert at Hanbridge. Very hearty, Rubinstein was. Came upstairs and all. When they'd done playing he kissed my husband. Mr. Joicey didn't quite like that, but being in the profession, you see, he couldn't very well say anything. Rubinstein didn't stay here, but of course I wasn't letting rooms in those days. Never dreamt of such a thing. Only now it's thanks to my musical connections, and that grand piano, that musicians on tour generally prefer this house——

Enter Louisa rather quickly.

Louisa. I heard the front gate creak as I came upstairs.

Snape [who has been calmly gazing at Mrs. Joicey, now gazing at the sliced dumpling]. So that is the sliced roly-poly! [*Takes the plate from Louisa.*]

Mrs. Joicey [to Louisa]. Better get on with your duties, Louisa.

Louisa. Will it do, sir?

Snape. It will.

[*Exit Louisa by double doors at back, which reveal bedroom.*]

Mrs. Joicey [half reflectively]. And what does he teach at this time o' night, I wonder?

Snape [putting down plate]. Mrs. Joicey, what a question! Mr. Diaz is usually considered to be the greatest pianist after Rubinstein. Cer-

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tainly the greatest interpreter of Chopin since Chopin died.

Mrs. Joicey [smoothly]. Oh, I know! I know some of them have pupils that follow 'em about from place to place. [*Knock heard below.*] I'd better answer the door.

Louisa [who has reappeared at double-doors]. I'll run down.

Snape [with a preventing gesture]. I will go. [*Indicating the double doors, to both women, conspiratorially.*] This way please—and out by the passage—at once. [*Exit L.*]

Louisa. What's afoot?

Mrs. Joicey. Nothing, miss.

Louisa. Then my name's not Louisa.

Mrs. Joicey. There's a lady coming, seemingly. It's a pupil.

Louisa [glancing at the dumpling plate]. Sweet-tooth!

Snape [heard off]. Everything is in order, sir.

Louisa [in a whisper]. He told us to go at once.

Mrs. Joicey [somewhat rebellious]. And what if he did!

[*Exeunt Mrs. Joicey and Louisa back. The double doors are closed reluctantly. Snape ushers Diaz and Carlotta into the room, L, and exit.*]

Diaz. Now which chair will you have? [*Waving a hand comically to indicate the various chairs.*]

You see them! They are all equally—hostile to the human form.

Carlotta [*still near the door, smiling timidly*]. Is he gone—Mr.—you introduced us, but I forget his name—your secretary?

Diaz. Snape? He probable considers that his day's work is over. He's just—gone, that's all. I never inquire, you know.

Carlotta. I think I'd better go too.

Diaz. But—I thought you—we—I thought it was understood that you waited here till it was time to go across to the station for the mail-train.

Carlotta. Everything's different now I'm actually here. It was all right when we were driving down from Hanbridge with Mr. Snape in the car. I suppose it was the rain made it seem so matter-of-fact. I was frightened when we found the train had gone, but when I thought of the mail-train and you went with me to the stationmaster to see if I could travel by it, I felt all right again. It seemed the most natural thing in the world that I should come and wait here for an hour with you and Mr. Snape, instead of waiting all alone at the station. You were so natural.

Diaz. And am I not natural now?

Carlotta. Oh, yes! But—of course I quite understand about Mr. Snape—but—somehow—Besides, you must be too frightfully tired to play any more to-night.

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Diaz [gently]. Now, is that quite—quite sincere—that last?

Carlotta. No, it isn't. I don't really believe you're ever tired. But—it's like this. You may feel natural. But I don't feel natural—not any more. I think I'd better go, truly. I don't want you to come with me. I can run back to the station in a jiffy—it has nearly stopped raining.

Diaz. I'm very sorry, very sorry. Before you go, won't you tell me your name?

Carlotta [after a pause, low]. Magdalen.

Diaz [incredulous, quickly]. It isn't.

Carlotta [on her dignity]. Excuse me——

Diaz. I beg your pardon. Do forgive me, please. There's only one thing I'd like to say. I hope you don't think for one moment that I've been trying to—inveigle you here.

Carlotta [smiles calmly]. Mr. Diaz, I knew exactly what I was doing—and when I did it.

Diaz. “When you did it?”

Carlotta. You see, I sat such a long time in the hall, while the people were going out. I don't know how it was—the music I suppose—your music—I couldn't move.

Diaz. I was watching you.

Carlotta. Watching me?

Diaz. Yes, from behind. I was just on the point of coming round, or sending Mr. Snape, when you got up and left. You were the last to go. I followed you.

Carlotta. But why?

Diaz. I thought I might just possibly have a chance of thanking you—for the way you'd listened to me.

Carlotta [*dreamily*]. How strange! [*Suddenly.*] Why did you have the piano moved half-way across the platform at the interval?

Diaz. So that I could see you better while I was playing.

Carlotta. It's unbelievable.

Diaz. On the contrary! If you knew what a really sympathetic listener means to an artist! Just *one*—in a whole audience! The artist plays to that one. . . . So when I caught sight of you almost alone in the portico, I collected all my courage and came straight up to you and *did* thank you. That was how it all came about.

Carlotta. No, Mr. Diaz, it didn't begin to come about until I said to you, "If you want to thank me you can thank me by getting me a cab." As soon as I'd said that I knew exactly what I'd done. I can't imagine what ever made me say such a thing. I know I do talk like that sometimes, but to you!

Diaz. Not a bit. It was the most natural answer in the world. In fact I deserved it. And as I had a car waiting for me and we were going in the same direction— I shan't say I'm sorry we missed the train, because I'm not.

Carlotta. Well, thank you very much for being

so kind [*holding out her hand, which he takes*].

Diaz. I should like to have played to you—here, just you and I together.

Carlotta [*withdrawing from him and throwing back her wrap*]. I'm insulting you!

Diaz [*puzzled*]. And how?

Carlotta. By saying that I won't stay till it's time to go to the station. Yes, I'm insulting you! Nobody could play like you play if he wasn't as straight as a die.

[*In silence he takes her wrap, and she sits down with an abrupt girlish gesture.*]

Diaz [*quietly*]. That's not quite true to life, you know.

Carlotta. What isn't?

Diaz. That serious artists are—well—always straight.

Carlotta. Isn't it?

Diaz. No. You're very young and inexperienced.

Carlotta. Indeed I'm not inexperienced. I've had my eyes wide open for ages.

Diaz [*sitting down; in an easy, brotherly tone*]. Well, tell me something about those ages.

Carlotta. No, no! You must talk.

Diaz. I thought I was to play.

Carlotta. Now—— [*Stops.*]

Diaz. Yes?

Carlotta [*leaning forward*]. Do you understand people?

Diaz. I think so.

Carlotta. You know what I mean—*understand?*

Diaz. Yes.

Carlotta. Well then, I needn't tell you I'm fearfully nervous. You wouldn't expect anything else, would you, me being here like this, so suddenly, and talking face to face with *you*? Perhaps I don't look it, but I hardly know what I'm saying. So you will *understand*, won't you? [*Diaz nods.*] [*Insisting.*] Whatever I say?

Diaz. Why do you insist? We're friends.

Carlotta [*smiling*]. I only insist because women are so much cruder than men, and I might say something——

Diaz [*interrupting*]. Are they so much cruder than men? Who told you that?

Carlotta. Oh, I've noticed it. I mean in what they say. They aren't always honest, and yet they are honest—terribly. Men hate to admit things, but women like to. I know I do, even if it hurts me. And my aunt often tells me I'm crude.

Diaz. But your aunt is a woman too.

Carlotta. No, she's an old spinster. There I go, you see!

Diaz. Well now, after this exciting introduction, what is it you're afraid I mightn't understand?

Carlotta. Oh, but you will! It's only this.

This evening's a miracle for me. I do so want to live it. I always feel people don't give themselves up to the present enough. I know I'm always thinking about the next thing. Now, for instance, to-night—the train. There's over an hour to the train. I want to forget it till it's time for me to leave. I want to drench myself in my miracle. Let me. When I ask you to talk, don't remind me that I asked you to play. You can do both. But talk first. You don't know what it means to me. You say you understand. Do understand. You can't, but you must. I want to know you. I want to see inside you. I always have wanted.

Diaz. But I thought you said on the way here you'd never heard me before.

Carlotta. I hadn't. But— [*Stops. Then more quietly.*] Tell me what your *life* is.

Diaz. My life! My life is on the road—with Snape and a piano—sometimes a couple of pianos. I have three subjects of study, and I don't think I'm conceited in saying I know as much about those three vast and inexhaustible subjects as anybody on this earth.

Carlotta. Yes. What are they?

Diaz. Concert-halls, railway-trains, and hotels.

Carlotta. Oh!

Diaz. Yes. I am always, always in one or another of them. And that is my life.

Carlotta. But this isn't a hotel?

Diaz. No. Now and then I get into such a state that I feel as if one more hotel, only one more, would drive me mad. Snape heard of this house, and it makes quite a piquant change. It's like a picnic into another century. Moreover, that piano is almost good. But to-morrow night will see me in a hotel again. Yes, to-morrow morning I shall lie in the bed there as long as I can, because I hate getting up, and then Snape will make me get up, and my belongings will be put into my two trunks, and before I leave the bedroom I shall look round and I shall say: "Sure you've put everything in, Snape?" and there will be nothing left in the bedroom that is mine, and I shall turn away, and do you know what I shall be thinking? I shall be thinking: "Well, I shall never sleep in that bed any more." And when I get to the station people will nudge each other and point out to each other that the great and glorious being, Diaz, is on the platform. And that's my life.

Carlotta. But you do travel. Surely it must be wonderful to see fresh countries. I've never been out of England.

Diaz. I never see fresh countries. I've seen them all, and I've seen them all several times—North America, South America, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Russia, Spain. Snape and I are first-class authorities on the concert-halls, railway-trains and hotels of all of them.

Carlotta [taking it in, thoughtful]. Yes. . . . But what about foreign languages? You do hear and speak foreign languages. Don't you like doing that? I should. I should like it more than anything—well, almost anything. All foreign languages are so romantic. And when you speak them you feel proud, don't you? I can't even speak French; I can only read it. Now you speak English simply marvellously. That's just what surprised me. Nobody could tell you aren't English.

Diaz. Well, I am—nearly. English is really my only language. My mother was English, and my father was half English and half Spanish. He taught dancing in Dublin. Of course I never let on that I'm three-quarters English. If I did nobody would believe that I can play the piano.

Carlotta. I can't bear to hear you talk like that. Now, tell me about your parents.

Diaz. I'm an orphan. I mean—my father and mother are both dead. I hate the word orphan. There's something so sentimental about it.

Carlotta. That's how I like to hear you talk! That's exactly how I feel, but it never occurred to me anybody else felt the same. My father and mother are both dead.

Diaz. Are they?

Carlotta. Yes—long ago. Before I can remember. . . . And when auntie happens to mention that I'm an orphan, I squirm . . . [*Softly.*]

I won't ask you about your parents. Tell me about your friends.

Diaz. Friends. Well, yes, I suppose I have one or two somewhere about the world. But you see they're like me—always imprisoned in concert-halls, railway-trains and hotels. We may meet now and then in a big city—never in a small one. We say, How d'ye do, how d'ye do, and pass on, because you know we haven't much spare time. We must practise. Play scales. Hours and hours. Every day. Wherever we are. We daren't leave off. And that *is* my life.

Carlotta. But you have a home. I remember quite well reading about your palace in Fontainebleau. In fact I cut it out of the paper.

Diaz. Not a palace. There is only one palace at Fontainebleau, and that's the palace where Napoleon signed his abdication. Still, my place there is an agreeable and spacious abode, so far as I remember. I was in it seven months ago, for one night. I believe it is a paradise for the servants.

Carlotta. And servants are so wasteful!

Diaz. They are. But mine have every excuse. They can always read about my income in the papers, and they consider that some sustained effort ought to be made to spend it.

Carlotta. I should have thought you would have spent the summer in a place like Fontainebleau. I looked it up in the encyclopædia. It

must be lovely. You don't give concerts all summer, do you?

Diaz. Oh, no. I usually begin my summer in Fontainebleau, but after about a week or so I can't stand it any longer, and I go round the watering-places—Deauville, Ostend, anywhere—and do a little gambling. I enjoy gambling. It's my one recreation. . . . Why! Are those tears in your eyes?

Carlotta [*successfully cheerful*]. Yes—but they won't drop. [*Grave again.*] It's very sad—I can't help saying it.

Diaz. But I assure you I don't lose more in a whole summer than I can earn in a couple of days.

Carlotta. Oh! I didn't mean the gambling. I think I should adore gambling. I meant——

Diaz. Yes. I see what you meant, but you asked me to tell you. Well, I've tried to alter it—and failed. Before my illness I had some plans for ameliorating the unhappy lot of a world-renowned pianist, but they didn't survive.

Carlotta. Your illness was very serious, wasn't it? It was in all the papers.

Diaz. They told me it was pretty bad.

Carlotta. Who nursed you?

Diaz. Nurses.

Carlotta. And is it quite, quite gone, now?

Diaz. Oh, yes. Quite. Except this [*picking up a little case from a table*].

Carlotta. What is that?

Diaz. Morphine.

Carlotta. Do you take it?

Diaz. Sometimes. Inject it—subcutaneously.
Done in a second. Doctor's advice—suggestion.

Carlotta. But it's a drug, isn't it?

Diaz. That's exactly what it is.

Carlotta. When you've taken it you feel you are under it—under its influence. Something in you that's stronger than you.

Diaz. Yes.

Carlotta [*commiseratingly, tenderly, not reprovingly*]. How dreadful! [*With more vigour.*] I could not bear that, myself. I would sooner be ill. No, I could not bear it!

Diaz [*rather apologetically*]. We never know what we mayn't have to bear, do we? [*Lightly.*] Now I've told you what my life is. Admit you're disillusioned, horribly disillusioned.

Carlotta [*firmly and cheerfully*]. I prefer to be disillusioned.

Diaz [*after looking at her*]. You're a strange woman.

Carlotta. Why am I strange? Is it strange to prefer to know the truth? If I have illusions I want to lose them—of course! The truth is always more romantic, really. All that you've told me is wonderful. Even if it's unhappy, it's wonderful. It's thrilling. It's more miraculous even than I thought it could be. And I can see

now that it must be like that. But you haven't told me everything.

Diaz. Haven't I?

Carlotta. No.

Diaz. What haven't I told you?

Carlotta. The most important thing. . . . I hated to see all those silly hysterical women crowding round the piano at the end of the concert to-night. [*Appealingly.*] You hated it too, didn't you?

Diaz. I was in terror lest you should step up and join them. If you had done——

Carlotta [*shaking her head*]. You might have been sure I never should.

Diaz. How could I be sure? I didn't know you.

Carlotta. Yes, you knew me.

Diaz. Well, perhaps I did.

Carlotta. Do you often have to go through that kind of—siege?

Diaz. Yes [*lightly*], it's part of the routine.

Carlotta. But— Now you said you'd *understand*.

Diaz. Listen, young lady, do you want to discuss the subject of love?

Carlotta. Why not? We're perfect strangers.

Diaz. Certainly that helps. But where do you stand in the matter?

Carlotta. I've read Shakespeare and Browning.

Diaz. Oh! That's nothing.

Carlotta. You're quite right. It *is* nothing. But it's all. Till to-night I'd never once talked alone with a man, except at lawn-tennis or a dance—you know the sort of stuff. I thought you'd tell me something. [*Pause.*] Why shouldn't I know? The time will come when I shall know—everything.

Diaz [*gently*]. Yes, but the time and the man who tells will come together.

Carlotta [*timid*]. Is it so?

Diaz. It is so.

Carlotta. Tell me just one thing. Is it worth while, love—honest Indian?

Diaz. I can't tell you.

Carlotta. Now you're not *understanding*. You're being conventional—you think I'm morbid.

Diaz. Honest Indian, I'm not. I *can't* tell you.

Carlotta. But isn't there a woman who's made you tremendously happy or tremendously unhappy?—it doesn't matter which.

Diaz. No, there isn't.

Carlotta. Then it's true about you being nursed by nurses when you were ill?

Diaz. Quite true. [*Pause.*] Another illusion gone.

Carlotta. I don't like it to go.

Diaz. Why?

Carlotta. I've always thought of you as——

Diaz. Well, of course I'm not what you'd call an absolute stranger to the sex.

Carlotta. Oh! I'm so glad.

Diaz. Why?

Carlotta. I doubt if a woman likes a man not to know a great deal of women—unless he's very, very young.

Diaz. I don't remember that in either Shakespeare or Browning.

Carlotta. Perhaps that's my own.

Diaz. Tell me—I'm thirty-six. How old are you?

Carlotta. Twenty-one—nearly.

Diaz. And now tell me everything else. It's my turn to hold an inquiry. You play the piano.

Carlotta. Yes, but don't let me give you a wrong idea. [*Eagerly.*] Shall I tell you how I live?

Diaz [*lightly*]. After what has passed I think that's the least you can do.

Carlotta. I live with auntie in a Queen Anne house, and there's a pretty large garden all round it. And all round the garden there are little streets of little shops and workpeople's cottages, rather dirty. From my bedroom window I can see into the valley, and I can see all the other hills scattered about, and there are factory chimneys everywhere in the valley and on the horizon, and they never stop smoking, weekday or Sunday.

Of course we ought to have gone to live right in the country long ago, like other people, but auntie doesn't care to move. Auntie is a witch. She doesn't look like one—she looks like a perfect churchwoman and member of the Soldiers and Sailors' Families Association, which she is—but she's a witch. She's put a spell on the house and on the garden as well, and on the servants and the gardeners and the coachman. Our house used to be in the open country—we've got engravings of it like that. It still is in the open country, so far as auntie is concerned. All the trees and things in the district except ours are dirty grey with smoke. Our trees are green. And what's stranger still, our window-curtains are white. It's auntie's spell. Our garden with the house in the middle is just like an island in the sea. The sea washes round the walls, and the tide gets higher and higher, but it never washes in. Do you see what I mean?

Diaz. Yes.

Carlotta. Auntie thinks she's put her spell on me too. She doesn't really think she has, but she pretends to herself she has. And so I live there, and I'm very happy. I'm sad, but it's a happy sort of sadness, because auntie's frightfully fond of me, without understanding me a bit, and also because I'm waiting for something wonderful to occur, and I don't know what it is. I live all by myself in my head—nobody can see inside it.

I read—lots. And I go in and out and in and out by the side gate, and the sea keeps washing in there—but that's a secret. Auntie doesn't know. Yes, I do play the piano—not what *you'd* call playing. Still, I do play. I play Chopin. I've got Mikuli's edition—it's the best, isn't it? Auntie gave it me. She never guessed she was giving me the key of all the world. You know when you read something about some one—some one that's alive—and instantly you've read it that person is *somebody* to you. That happened to you with me. I *felt* that no one could play Chopin like you. Then I cut your photograph out of the *Illustrated London News*, and I put it in the Nocturnes, and when I'm playing alone I have it on the piano with me. That's why I know you so well. It's quite true—I like Chopin better than anything else in music, and I like music better than anything outside music, but I'm not really a musician. I think I'm a writer. I seem somehow to be able to write.

Diaz. What do you write?

Carlotta. I've written a novel about political life in London.

Diaz. Then you've lived in London too. I thought you must have done.

Carlotta. No, I haven't. I've never been there. You see I've just written my idea of what it is. Auntie knew in a vague sort of way that I was writing. But she didn't know I was writing a

novel. And now something dreadful's occurred.

Diaz. What's that?

Carlotta. I got the novel typewritten and sent it to London, and it's been accepted! And I've got to tell auntie.

Diaz. Really!

Carlotta. Yes, it may seem funny, but it's been accepted.

Diaz. But surely all this must be the something wonderful that you've been waiting to happen to you in your spellbound garden!

Carlotta [*carelessly*]. Oh! It's very nice. But I don't call that wonderful. I knew that would happen sooner or later. I'm awfully conceited, you know—and yet I'm not.

Diaz. Then what do you mean by "wonderful"? [*Carlotta gives a baffled gesture.*] The subject has already been mentioned—do you mean love?

Carlotta. No. Not specially. It might be. But then it mightn't.

Diaz. Well, in your sense of the word "wonderful," what's the most wonderful thing that's happened to you up to now?

Carlotta [*after reflecting*]. Shall I tell you?

Diaz. Do.

Carlotta [*with feeling*]. . . . When you had the piano moved in the middle of the concert, so that you could see me better while you played.

. . . I shall never be the same girl again. I'm another girl. . . . I must go.

Diaz. No, no! Remember about living in the present. The train is a long way off.

Carlotta. It will be terrible when I get home. Auntie will have sent the carriage back to the station for me, on the chance of me being on the mail-train. Thank goodness she won't be at the station. I told a frightful lie so that I could come to the concert to-night. Auntie had bought two tickets, and then this afternoon she says she's feeling very unwell and I can't possibly go alone. You don't know how I felt. I'd been living at your concert for a month past. I could have died—really. I sent up a note to Ethel Ryley—a school friend of mine who's just got married—and I implored her to go with me. She wrote back to say she couldn't. So I told auntie she'd written to say she could go, and I was to meet her at the station. Auntie was in bed by that time. I shall have to go up to auntie's bedroom as soon as ever I get home, and if she's asleep I shall have to wake her and tell her—about all this.

Diaz. But must you?

Carlotta. Must I! I always pay the price—cash! And I always will. There's something in me that makes me. And I like to.

Diaz [*looking at her with admiration, rather wistfully*]. You are—strong! But now you

really ought to take something. Please do—before I play. [*He moves to the table where the food is.*]

Carlotta [*trying to change her mood to lightness*]. Ought I? [*She follows him.*]

Diaz. Let me see. Will you have some fowl?

Carlotta. Oh! What perfectly marvellous cake! What sort of cake is it?

Diaz [*looking at the sliced roly-poly*]. I don't know. Snape doesn't usually get cake at all. We eat together after concerts, he and I. He seems to have surpassed himself to-night. I've never seen any cake like that cake.

Carlotta. May I help myself?

Diaz. Please. [*Begins to pour out drinks.*]

Carlotta [*biting into the jam roly-poly; disillusioned*]. Why, it's only cold jam roly-poly with sugar on it!

Diaz. Never! I'll make Snape swallow every crumb of it, as a punishment for putting this shame upon me.

Carlotta [*recovering herself quickly*]. But I just love it. . . . Only I can't really eat to-night. . . . No thanks, nothing to drink.

Diaz. Well, then, I can't either.

Carlotta [*with sudden curtness*]. Well, then, play.

Diaz. What would you like me to play?

Carlotta [*appealingly, with emotion imperfectly restrained*]. Don't ask me to decide.

Diaz [*becoming rather masterful*]. But you must.

Carlotta [*still more appealingly, looking up at him*]. Please! [*Pause.*] I couldn't choose, even if your playing or not playing depended on it. You don't realize. You don't know how I feel—how I felt at the concert. You couldn't. When you play—I receive. I'm—I'm like a vase. Shall the vase—choose?

Diaz [*turning abruptly away, and then speaking*]. I'll play something for a room. Chamber music. Not for the concert-hall. The conditions are different. [*Looking at her as he approaches the piano.*] The influence of the artist is so much more personal and effective—in a room.

Carlotta [*feebly*]. You make me afraid.
[*She sits down so that she is screened from the player by the piano. Diaz sits down at the piano.*]

Diaz [*without looking at her*]. Not there.

Carlotta. Yes. I like this seat.

Diaz [*in a tremulous, sharp tone, without looking at her*]. No. I cannot see you. Come over here, please, where I can see you. [*Looking at her.*] I am used to seeing you while I play.

[*Carlotta changes her seat.*]

Carlotta [*nervously*]. Chopin?

[*Diaz nods, and drags his chair a little forward.*

Carlotta settles herself in her seat, clearing her throat. The pianist's hands are lifted

over the keyboard. Then there are very faint noises of Mrs. Joicey and Louisa outside. They are going up to the second story. Their voices are subdued. Mrs. Joicey's voice is heard, and the words just distinguished: "I tell you she's gone." Carlotta gives a nervous start, listening. The noises outside, always faint, die away. Absolute silence. Carlotta leans back, relieved.

Diaz begins to play the Revolutionary Study of Chopin [op. 25, No. 11]. After about twenty bars Carlotta springs up, with a violent and forbidding gesture towards the pianist. He stops playing and hurries forward. The atmosphere of the scene suddenly becomes intensely emotional.]

Diaz. What is the matter?

Carlotta [now and henceforward with somewhat of the mature bearing of a fully grown woman]. I cannot bear it.

Diaz. But what is the matter?

Carlotta. It is too beautiful. [*She falls back into her chair as if exhausted.*] It's too beautiful, I tell you.

Diaz [with ecstatic realization of the effect of the music on her.] Does my playing affect you like that? [*She nods.*] You are marvellous.

Carlotta. No, it's not I that am marvellous. It's you that are marvellous. When you were describing your life you left out all that.

Diaz. All what?

Carlotta. All the beautiful part! All the sensations you produce! All the power over others! You must know there's nothing equal to it in the whole world. Don't you? Don't you realize what an autocrat you are?

Diaz [*appealingly*]. And yet— You have divined how I suffer, and how tragic my life is!

Carlotta [*rising; bravely*]. Yes.

Diaz [*passionately*]. Never on this earth have I met a woman like you! . . . Who are you?

Carlotta [*after a slight pause*]. I told you my name.

Diaz [*gazing at her.*] Enchantress! [*Kisses her hand.*]

Carlotta [*looking at her hand; humbly, deprecatingly*]. Not that!

Diaz. And why not?

Carlotta [*in another tone, stepping back virginally*]. It is too sudden. I have admired and understood you for years, without having seen you. But you—you never even knew of my existence until to-night.

Diaz. Listen! I will tell you something mysterious and inexplicable. The most beautiful things and the most vital things and the most lasting things—come suddenly.

Carlotta [*hesitating*]. I am helpless.

Diaz. You! With your character! It is your strength that I have envied. . . . Give it to me.

Carlotta [*half to herself*]. Why should I be afraid of my miracle?

[*Diaz takes her hand again to kiss it. She withdraws it.*]

Carlotta. Kiss higher than the hand.

[*They embrace.*]

CURTAIN.

SCENE II

The same room the next morning. Louisa on her knees at the fireplace is clearing the ashes from the grate. The room is full of the cold, dim, blue light of dawn.

Enter Carlotta from the back, stealthily. She starts at seeing Louisa, and Louisa also starts.

Louisa [recovering herself]. Good morning!

Carlotta [excited and very nervous]. Hush! He's asleep.

Louisa [lower]. Is he! Better shut the door, then, if you don't want to wake him. [She rises and shuts the door which Carlotta has left ajar.] Now! . . . [benevolent and curious], I knew you hadn't gone.

Carlotta. Will you do something for me? Lend me a hat.

Louisa [staggered]. A hat?

Carlotta. Yes. One of your own. Anything will do. I'll pay you whatever you want for it.

Louisa. I've got three. I should think my last year's straw would suit you best.

Carlotta. Yes, yes! Please! Quick! You

see I must go—now, at once. And I can't possibly be seen in the street without something on my head.

Louisa [*to herself as she leaves room, L*]. Talk about swallowing a camel and straining at a gnat! Stops out all night, but she can't possibly be seen in the street without a hat.

[*Carlotta looks for her cloak, finds it, and puts it on, and stands waiting. Re-enter Louisa with a straw hat, which Carlotta snatches at.*]

Louisa [*as she watches Carlotta putting on the hat at the mirror*]. Yes. It'll do. My sister always did say it was too young for me. But I'm glad I bought it, now. It's a good thing it was me and not my sister that was in here. My sister's very narrow, my sister is. I'm different. I don't know what would have become of me if it hadn't been for my sister. I *should* have been a oner!

Carlotta. I'm frightfully obliged to you. How much is it, please?

Louisa. Nay! Ye're very welcome. I can easily make up a tale to my sister.

Carlotta. But I should prefer to pay.

Louisa. Yes. I daresay you would. But you see you can't.

Carlotta. You're very kind.

Louisa. Well, I'm like that.

Carlotta. Will you undo the front door for me?

Louisa. Front door's open. We always open it first thing to air the house. Just slip quietly down the stairs and it's in front of you. And look here—[*very kindly*] I've not seen you. I've seen nothing.

Carlotta [*at the door*]. Thank you! You're awfully good-natured.

Louisa [*with a break in her voice*]. Well, I'm like that. And you're so young.

[*Exit Carlotta, L.*]

[*Louisa bursts into tears.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT II

Drawing-room of Carlotta's flat in Bloomsbury.

Doors R. leading to hall, and L. leading to boudoir. Window centre back, with view of roofs, etc., indicating that the flat is on an upper story. Furnished with genuine taste. A grand piano, with a cabinet photograph of Diaz on it, in a leather frame.

TIME: Afternoon.

Over seven years have passed.

Carlotta is alone.

Enter Jocelyn and Lord Francis Alcar.

Lord Francis. Good afternoon, Miss Peel. You must blame Jocelyn for bringing me here.

Carlotta. How nice of you to come, Lord Francis! Jocelyn, I shall richly reward you.

Jocelyn [kissing Carlotta]. Well, I'll tell you in a minute how you can richly reward me. I was coming along here in the new car because I was dying to see you, and in Piccadilly I overtook Lord Francis showing off his beautiful new suit to an admiring world. And he said he wanted to come too.

Lord Francis. It was an opportunity not to be missed. And my desire to look at you and listen to you got the better of my fear of the imperfectly tamed monster that this young woman calls the new car.

Jocelyn. Imperfectly tamed! Why, it will eat out of my hand! Now, Miss Peel, I've got a very serious piece of news for you.

Carlotta. Well, let's sit down. [*They sit.*]

Jocelyn [*seriously*]. Mother's paying a call on you this afternoon [*with relief*], but she won't be here just yet. I'm getting my shot in first.

Carlotta. I shall be delighted to see your mother.

Jocelyn. Oh! You are awful, Miss Peel.

Carlotta. Why?

Jocelyn. No one could possibly be *delighted* to see mother. Do you know, when I refused to go to church last Sunday father said it didn't matter because we always had a church in the house. He meant mother. And mother is really rather like a church.

Lord Francis. I see already that this is no place for me. I've wandered by mistake into the wrong generation.

Jocelyn. And what's more—I think Mrs. Ispenlove's coming, too. We passed her in Caroline Street, and she had a look on her face just as if she was going to pay a state visit to her husband's principal author. Mother says the

Ispenloves have gone into their new house simply on the strength of your books. Of course mother always has a fearful down on publishers, but I do think there's something in it as regards the Ispenloves. Every one says Mr. Ispenlove must have made thousands and thousands out of your books, Miss Peel. . . . I seem to be doing all the talking. . . .

Carlotta. But we love it, don't we, Lord Francis?

Lord Francis. Without doubt. Do conquer your diffidence, Jocelyn.

Jocelyn. Well now, about that reward.

Carlotta. What reward?

Jocelyn. I like that! You said you would richly reward me for bringing Lord Francis, and you've forgotten all about it already! [*Coaxingly.*] I'll tell you what I want, Miss Peel. Mother won't let me read your novels. Do make her. I'm particularly dying to read "The Curtain." That's really what I came about. You could speak to her when she comes.

Carlotta. But why won't she let you read them?

Jocelyn. She says they—aren't for me. What I say is—they're much more for me than they are for her.

Carlotta. How do you know that?

Jocelyn. Well, aren't they frightfully advanced? As a matter of fact I know they are.

Carlotta. Now, Jocelyn, do please be a woman of the world.

Jocelyn. But I am.

Carlotta. Are you? A woman of the world exercises her imagination. A woman of the world would see that you are putting me in an impossible position. How can I say to your mother: "Mrs. Sardis, I understand you refuse to let your daughter Jocelyn read my novels. I beg you not to let this occur again." I assure you that modern lady novelists [*with irony on the phrase*] do not talk to each other in that way.

Jocelyn. I see what you mean. I never thought of that.

Lord Francis. You've got all your mother's books to read.

Jocelyn. I've read 'em.

Lord Francis. Then she lets you read her own novels?

Jocelyn. There's no letting about it. I jolly well have to. Worse luck! I never could understand mother's popularity. Father can't either. [*To Carlotta.*] Then you can't do anything for me? You couldn't just hint . . .?

Carlotta. I hate hints.

Jocelyn. Oh! So do I! Well, all right then. Do you know what I shall do? I shall go straight to Hatchards, and I shall buy "The Curtain," out

of my own hard-earned, and I shall take it home, and I shall tear the cover off it.

Carlotta. Oh, Jocelyn!

Jocelyn. Yes, and I shall tear the cover off one of mother's books, and I shall stickphast your book inside mother's covers, and I shall flaunt it in front of her. And she'll think I'm reading her silly old thing twice over—which heaven forbid! . . . Now I've finished, Lord Francis. You can have your turn. I do want to hear you and Miss Peel talk.

Lord Francis. No, Jocelyn! No! I see plainly now that I made a mistake in letting you bring me here. I ought to have come alone.

Jocelyn. Then you won't talk in front of me. You'll trust your very life to a turn of my wrist in Piccadilly Circus, but you won't talk because I'm here. I must say I'm getting a bit fed up.

Lord Francis [*protesting against all this language*]. Remember, my child, that you are in the presence of a very distinguished woman.

Carlotta [*sympathetically*]. Don't you detest distinguished people, Jocelyn?

Jocelyn. Oh, I do! They're ten a penny in our house. Mother's been translated into nine languages— [*A parrot screams off.*] What's that?

Carlotta. It's the parrot, back from the vet's. I expect Miss Palmer's feeding it.

Jocelyn. In the boudoir?

Carlotta. Yes.

Jocelyn. Can I go and look at it?

Carlotta. Do.

Jocelyn. I adore Miss Palmer. She isn't celebrated.

Lord Francis. Miss Palmer?

Carlotta. My secretary.

Jocelyn. The ever-faithful Emmeline! [*On the way out.*] Whose is this portrait that's always on the piano?

Carlotta. It's a famous pianist.

Jocelyn. Did you know him?

Carlotta [*evenly, after a slight pause*]. I only met him once in my life—years ago.

Jocelyn. Why do you have his portrait always on the piano?

Carlotta. Well, you see, he *could* play the piano.

Jocelyn. What's his name?

Carlotta. Diaz—Emilio Diaz.

Jocelyn. I never heard of him.

Lord Francis. Such is fame.

[*Exit Jocelyn, l. with a charmingly impudent bow to Lord Francis.*]

Lord Francis [*indicating Jocelyn*]. And you were like that once?

Carlotta. I wonder.

Lord Francis. More or less.

Carlotta. I should say rather less than more.

Lord Francis. But you know what I mean?

Carlotta. Yes.

Lord Francis. And how long since is it?

Carlotta. Since what? Since I was a young girl—within the meaning of the Act? It's difficult to say.

Lord Francis. Why?

Carlotta. Because when you're a young girl you don't know you are. You don't find out till afterwards, and often quite a long time afterwards. If you tried to persuade Jocelyn that she's all that *you* mean by a young girl, you'd fail. She's convinced that people older than herself have a great deal to learn, and she feels disillusioned because once she hoped to be able to teach them a thing or two, whereas now she knows they're too stupid to learn. That's Jocelyn's picture of herself. There are no young girls. There never were any—in your sense.

Lord Francis. Dear me! And I thought this conversation would be so simple! Well, never mind. Let me lead you quietly back to the point. How long is it since you were more or less like Jocelyn? Ten years?

Carlotta. Oh, no! Perhaps—well, seven.

Lord Francis. And what brought about the change?

Carlotta. Is this just curiosity, Lord Francis, or personal interest?

Lord Francis. Impersonal interest. I'm an old man, a very old man—over eighty. I'm in-

different to everything, except food and warmth. I've nothing to gain and scarcely anything to lose. I don't live. I survive. My sole hobby is facts—about human nature. I don't divide facts into categories. Anybody may tell me anything without troubling to blush. I can offer to my friends the rare luxury of shameless candour, combined with absolute ease and safety.

Carlotta. It's terrifying, but it's tempting.

Lord Francis. Ah! You understand! Tell me. You live alone. Have you no relatives?

Carlotta. Not since my aunt died. She died very suddenly. I went to a concert; and when I got home I found her dead.

Lord Francis. Maiden aunt?

Carlotta. Yes.

Lord Francis. I suppose you were about twenty then.

Carlotta. Yes.

Lord Francis. What sort of a concert?

Carlotta. Piano recital. Chopin.

Lord Francis. And after that you were by yourself?

Carlotta. I came to London.

Lord Francis. With the manuscript of your first novel in your trunk.

Carlotta. No. That went first. Luggage in advance. Mr. Ispenlove had already bought it. I threw myself at the Ispenloves. They gave me my first lessons in the great subject of London.

I took this flat, wrote another novel—two more, took a secretary—wrote three more novels, bought a parrot——

Lord Francis. The parrot is a disturbing sign.

Carlotta. Yes, it is. But not so disturbing as cats would be. Then I wrote another novel. Indeed I finished it only yesterday. I've written eight novels in eight years, and made more money than I can spend. And there you are!

Lord Francis. But you've explained nothing—nothing whatever—about the change from somebody more or less like Jocelyn—to you.

Carlotta. Haven't I? Still, everything happened just like that.

Lord Francis. Now listen to the detached and frigid spectator. I've read your books. And I think you've explained the two sexes to each other just about as well as any novelist ever did. I turn from the books to their author, and I find a young creature who lived alone with a maiden aunt until she was twenty, and then lived alone with a parrot and a female clerk, and wrote eight long books in eight years, and became extremely famous. . . . There's something wrong with the equation. . . . [*In a more intimate tone.*] Where did you get it all from?

Carlotta. All what?

Lord Francis. All that's in your admirable but disconcerting books. . . . Out of your head?

Carlotta. I suppose so.

Lord Francis. Or out of your heart?

Carlotta. Lord Francis, you said you were very old; but let me warn you—you're getting dangerously younger every second.

Lord Francis. No. You are mistaking the signs. I'm getting older every second. The aged sometimes have a strange desire. I have it and occasionally it excites me. Nincompoops call it senile inquisitiveness, but it's really the desire to take into the next world all possible knowledge of this. . . . Might be useful, you see.

Carlotta. Yes, it might. But there are some little bits of information that the next world will just have to do without.

Lord Francis. Then it was the heart. I felt sure of it.

Carlotta. I never said so.

Lord Francis. Yes, you did. I understand. It was the heart—when you were twenty. Since then you have taken to writing as some women take to drugs. And it has obtained such a hold of you that you cannot do without it.

Carlotta. On the contrary, I have determined to do no more work for twelve months.

Lord Francis. Seriously?

Carlotta. Quite.

Lord Francis. Then you mean to give yourself to love—again.

Carlotta. Oh! . . . Do you advise it?

Lord Francis [coldly]. I absolutely prescribe it. [*With growing passion.*] I said I was indifferent to everything except food and warmth. But there's one thing that still arouses me. It's the sight of a young and beautiful woman growing older in solitude without noticing that she is growing older. Waste! Horrible waste! Against nature! You're beautiful—lovely. You have temperament. You were born for love. And you are prostituting yourself to—novels. Repent! It's dangerous. But repent! Risk unhappiness and disaster. But repent! The best years are almost gone.

Carlotta. You came to tell me this.

Lord Francis [coldly]. I did. I regard it as my privilege.

Enter Mrs. Sardis and Mrs. Ispenlove, R.

Mrs. Sardis [as she comes in, before Carlotta has quite recovered her equanimity]. Mrs. Ispenlove and I joined forces in the lift. How do you do?

Lord Francis [aside to Carlotta, as he slowly rises]. Another brace for you.

Mrs. Ispenlove [nervously]. Well, Carlotta. I only looked in for a moment.

Mrs. Sardis. Ah! Lord Francis.

[*The two new visitors shake hands with Carlotta, and Mrs. Sardis with Lord Francis Alcar.*]

Carlotta. So nice of you to call. I didn't

know that you and Mrs. Ispenlove knew each other. Lord Francis Alcar—Mrs. Ispenlove.

[*Lord Francis sits down apart, showing no interest whatever in the talk.*]

Mrs. Sardis. Oh, yes! We met once at a dinner——

Carlotta. I see.

Mrs. Sardis. Of the Publishing Trade Benevolent Society. And had quite a pleasant chat about trade matters. I remembered Mrs. Ispenlove perfectly. How is that clever husband of yours, Mrs. Ispenlove?

Mrs. Ispenlove [*controlling her nervousness*]. Very well, but very busy.

Mrs. Sardis. Thanks largely no doubt to the books of our friend [*indicating Carlotta*]. I always say—what a godsend it must be to a publisher, even if he is a pushing man, when he finds an author whose books the public will insist on buying—in spite of the strange business methods of publishers. And yet *some* publishers aren't satisfied with taking nearly all the money, they want all the glory, too. I know I left my last publisher because he always gave the impression that in addition to publishing my books—he wrote them.

[*During the foregoing Jocelyn enters.*]

Jocelyn [*very demure and submissive*]. Oh, mother darling!

Mrs. Sardis. No doubt, my child. But you

ought to have told your mother where you were going. You might have brought me. I had to come in a taxi, and when I arrive I find my own car at the door.

Jocelyn. Oh, mother darling, I didn't know. Lord Francis asked me to give him a lift.

Mrs. Sardis [*sweetly*]. Ah! In that case——

Lord Francis [*coldly*]. Is that my chauffeur? [*Rising.*] Please take me back at once to the precise spot in Piccadilly from which you abducted me. [*To Carlotta.*] Good-bye, dear lady.

Carlotta. But you'll have some tea, Lord Francis.

Lord Francis. No, I thank you. [*Shakes hands.*]

Carlotta. Why not?

Lord Francis. I never have tea in my friends' drawing-rooms now. It makes me feel as if I was on the stage. Tea has been served in every play I've seen for the last ten years. It was not so in my younger days. These modern dramatists have made tea impossible for decent people.

Jocelyn [*very prim*]. Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Ispenlove?

Mrs. Ispenlove. My dear! [*They shake hands.*]

Jocelyn. We often meet here, don't we? I see Mr. Ispenlove has just published a book about the Breton peasant. We're going to

Brittany in August, and I shall read it if mother thinks it wise for me to study the condition of the lower classes in France. May I, mother darling?

Mrs. Sardis. Certainly, my child.

Jocelyn. Good afternoon, Miss Peel. It was kind of you to let me see your adorable parrot. [*Shakes hands, bows to Mrs. Ispenlove.*] You coming, mother?

Mrs. Sardis. No, my child. Take great care of Lord Francis.

Lord Francis [*turning back from the door, to Jocelyn*]. Have you got a driving licence?

Jocelyn. Oh, yes, Lord Francis. I've had one for eight months. I'm nearly nineteen.

Carlotta. Good-bye.

[*Exeunt Lord Francis and Jocelyn, R. As she leaves, Jocelyn gives a youthful kick in the air.*]

Mrs. Ispenlove. I must go, too.

Carlotta [*turning to her from the departing guests*]. Not yet. Not yet.

Mrs. Ispenlove [*preoccupied*]. Yes. I called at the office to see Frank, but he wasn't in. I thought he might have run up here for a cup of tea [*Carlotta shakes her head*], and as it was on my way— Good-day, Mrs. Sardis.

Carlotta. Mr. Ispenlove hasn't been here for at least a week—not since I saw you last.

Mrs. Sardis [*to Mrs. Ispenlove*]. Good after-

noon. I hope we may meet again—perhaps at the next annual dinner of the Publishing Trade Benevolent Society.

Carlotta [*as Mrs. Ispenlove suddenly kisses her*]. Well, you are in a hurry.

[*Exit Mrs. Ispenlove quickly.*]

Carlotta. I'll ring for tea. [*Moving towards mantelpiece.*]

Mrs. Sardis. Please don't. Tea means servants, and I want to speak to you quite privately.

Carlotta [*returning*]. I have always understood that social life in London was founded on the axiom that servants are stone deaf by profession.

Mrs. Sardis. It may be; but the sight of their ears is disturbing. However, Miss Peel, I did not come for dialogue, which we can both compose so well in our different ways. I wish to talk to you about— [*Breaking off and beginning again.*] I'm thirty years older than you.

Carlotta. No one would think it.

Mrs. Sardis. When I'm dead you will inevitably take my place.

Carlotta. Take your place, Mrs. Sardis? Do you know that you are alarming me?

Mrs. Sardis. Let us be frank. Between colleagues false modesty is out of place. I am the leader of English fiction to-day. Not merely the leading woman novelist, but the leading novelist. I have been for twenty years, and I shall be until

I die or until I—relinquish the pen. Why pretend to ignore what is universally admitted? As Mr. Gladstone said, there is no question of rivalry—there cannot be. But when I am gone my mantle—if I may use the term—will fall on you.

Carlotta [*glancing at Mrs. Sardis' attire*]. Will it?

Mrs. Sardis. Unquestionably. You too have genius. And for the second time in succession the leadership of the greatest modern art will be held by a woman. A proud thought for our sex—although, mind you, I am a convinced opponent of women's suffrage. Now, Miss Peel, I admire your work extremely. At first I had my mental reservations—but the immense popular appreciation which you have received has done away with them entirely.

Carlotta. That is very nice, but surely your judgment isn't influenced by popular appreciation, is it?

Mrs. Sardis. Of course it is. My dear—the great public is always right. Look at my own case.

Carlotta [*convinced*]. Just so. But——

Mrs. Sardis. Pardon me. Let me come to my point. Now— [*stopping*]—may I call you Carlotta?

Carlotta. Please do, Mrs. Sardis.

Mrs. Sardis. Let me offer you a little advice, my dear, dear Carlotta. I know the public.

The public will accept any amount of—er—unconventionality in your novels—you have already taught it to do so—but only on one condition. Namely, that there is no suspicion of—er—unconventionality in your private life.

Carlotta [*simply*]. I see. The public won't mind what I say so long as it thinks I don't know what I am talking about. If it has reason to suppose that I do know what I'm talking about, then it will cease to respect me.

Mrs. Sardis [*very seriously*]. Exactly! You have stated the case with all your accustomed epigrammatic lucidity. . . . I needn't tell you, my dear girl, that I don't for a single moment suspect you of—knowledge. You have genius. That is enough. You and I know how novels are written. Nevertheless—forgive me—the tongue of scandal is at work. I am your true friend and I have come to warn you.

Carlotta. Is this the result of my Sunday golf?

Mrs. Sardis. My dear Carlotta, your name is being connected with that of Mr. Ispenlove!

Carlotta [*startled, but controlling herself*]. Mr. Ispenlove?

Mrs. Sardis. Your publisher! Oh, I am sure you are utterly innocent. If I was not sure of that my daughter would not be a visitor to this charming flat of yours. Probably your very innocence is responsible for the—er—artless un-

conventionality which has given rise to the tale. [*Reassuringly.*] You need not be apprehensive. The danger is already at an end. I have myself denied the slander. But there is a lesson in the incident. [*With real emotion.*] Carlotta, I am very jealous for the honour of our high vocation. And my desire is that when our biographies come to be written, yours and mine, no page shall be stained by even a rumour. And may I add just one word? I personally have nothing against Mr. Ispenlove. I am ready to believe that he is an excellent man, and that you think you owe a great deal to him. But my experience has taught me that purely formal relations are best—with one's publishers.

Carlotta [*enigmatically*]. Thank you, Mrs. Sardis. It would be impossible for me to tell you what value I attach to your candour—and your courage.

Mrs. Sardis. Not at all. [*Nonchalantly.*] I am full of sympathy for Mrs. Ispenlove, poor woman!

Carlotta. Really?

Mrs. Sardis. And I noticed you kissed her. That at any rate would alone dispose of——

Carlotta [*firmly*]. No. I didn't kiss her. She kissed me. And it was the first time. [*She gazes steadily at Mrs. Sardis.*]

Mrs. Sardis [*after a pause, disturbed*]. Oh!

Carlotta. Why are you so sorry for Mrs. Ispenlove?

Mrs. Sardis. Mr. Ispenlove has been the topic of conversation before . . . before ever you came to London.

Carlotta [*aroused*]. He is a friend of mine, and I must ask you——

Mrs. Sardis [*after a pause, still more disturbed*]. Oh!

[*Enter Frank Ispenlove, R, rather dishevelled.*

He makes a gesture toward Carlotta before catching sight of Mrs. Sardis.]

Mrs. Sardis. Mr. Ispenlove!

[*Overwhelmed by sudden and terrible suspicions, she bows gravely, and goes out in silence, R.*]

[*A pause.*].

Carlotta. What is the matter? Do you know your necktie is all crooked?

Ispenlove [*in a voice harsh with emotion*]. Ah! If you turn against me to-day, I shall—I don't know what I shall do.

Carlotta. Turn against you! . . . Let me straighten it for you.

Ispenlove [*dropping his hat; as she straightens the necktie*]. It's finished between Mary and me! . . . It's finished! I've no one but you now, and I've come—I've come——

[*Carlotta, having straightened the necktie, pats it. They look at each other. She holds out her hand. Instead of taking it, Ispenlove*

suddenly kisses her. For an instant Carlotta seems to resent the kiss. Then she relents.]

Ispenlove [holding her hand]. I can't believe it!

Carlotta [gravely]. Why not?

Ispenlove. Ever since yesterday I've been trying to come here, and I daren't. And I've been trying to think how I should say it, and I couldn't. And I've said nothing, and I've kissed you. [*Carlotta nods.*] A minute ago I was so miserable, I was in such a state—anything might have happened to me.

Carlotta. Poor boy!

Ispenlove. Now everything's all right. It seems as if I hadn't a care. Well, I haven't. You do love me? [*Carlotta nods.*] Say it, say it! . . . You aren't just taking pity on me. [*Carlotta shakes her head with a sad smile.*] I've always been in love with you—ever since that day you called at my office about your manuscript—your first day in London—and I drove you back to your hotel. I shall never forget the feel of being in the taxi with you. I didn't sleep all night—couldn't, didn't want to. I wouldn't have gone to sleep for anything. You see I couldn't bear not to be thinking about you.

Carlotta. You dear thing! How beautifully you tell me!

Ispenlove. But you haven't always been in love with *me*.

Carlotta. No.

Ispenlove. Then when did you—when did you first—I'm dying to know.

Carlotta. I didn't notice myself for a long time. But when you told me that the end of "The Curtain" was not as good as I could make it—do you remember that afternoon in your office?—you were so shy about criticising me, you were afraid to—your throat went dry and you stroked your forehead as you always do when you're nervous. There, you're doing it now, foolish boy! It was brave of you to tell me. Mind, you were wrong about the end of that book. I altered it to please you, quite against my conscience. I enjoyed altering it, and when I'd altered it I began to guess how fond of you I was. . . . That was it.

Ispenlove. It's incredible. Incredible! It passes comprehension!

Carlotta. Well, *of course*, dear! That's just what love does. Didn't you know? It's just the same for me as it is for you.

Ispenlove. No, no! You don't understand, you can't understand, how I felt when I first began to suspect that I really meant something to you. I'm nobody. I can't talk. I can't write. I can't play. I can't do anything. And

look at some of the fellows who come here! I'm nothing but a rotten publisher.

Carlotta. You are *you*! That was what seemed to be always the miracle to me, whenever we sat in your little private office, going through proofs and things—or pretending to.

Ispenlove [*reflective*]. What marvellous afternoons we have had!

Carlotta. Yes. It appears that they have caused remark.

Ispenlove. Caused remark? How?

Carlotta. I don't know. You saw Mrs. Sardis. She came to warn me that scandal had started. However, she's thoroughly convinced of our innocence. She was superb.

Ispenlove. But we'd done nothing.

Carlotta. Yes, we had. We'd fallen in love. Your clerks noticed my visits to the office. Do you suppose publishers' clerks aren't human? Do you suppose they're blind—or dumb? Do you suppose they don't know what being in love is themselves?

Ispenlove. I'd sack the lot for two pins!

Carlotta. Not you! You're much more likely to raise all their salaries.

Ispenlove. *Carlotta*— [*After gazing at her and turning away.*] Listen. Our two lives are in our hands at this moment—this moment while we're talking here.

Carlotta. I feel it.

Ispenlove. What are we to do? What shall we decide to do?

Carlotta. You see your wife and I are such good friends.

Ispenlove [*loudly*]. No! No! No! For God's sake, don't begin like that. You're above that sort of argument. Mary has been your friend. Good. You respect her; she respects you. Good. Is that a reason why our lives should be ruined, yours and mine? Will ruining our lives benefit Mary? I tell you everything is over between her and me. Everything.

Carlotta. She hasn't the least suspicion about me?

Ispenlove. I am aware of that. [*A pause.*]

Carlotta. Dear love, what do you want me to do?

Ispenlove. The only honest thing. I want you to go away with me so that Mary can get a divorce.

Carlotta [*soothingly*]. My poor boy!

Ispenlove [*calmed*]. We shall go away and leave everything. You understand?

Carlotta [*reflectively*]. Yes. Of all the things we possess now, we should have nothing but ourselves. Thousands have done what you are asking me to do. And all of them have thought that their own case was different from all the other cases. And a few have not regretted the

price. A few have been happy. A few have retained the illusion.

Ispenlove. Illusion, dear girl?

Carlotta. Yes. The supreme illusion of love. Isn't it an illusion? I have seen it at work in others, and in exactly the same way I see it at work in you and me. . . . No one can foretell the end of love.

Ispenlove. Carlotta, if you keep on like that, you'll frighten me.

Carlotta [*smiling*]. I? No. I will brace you. Because whatever the end of the illusion and the price paid, I am one of those who believe that the illusion is worth it and that it's divine. . . . Only, don't let our love be blind. We should go away. But we should creep back. They nearly all do; and we should. And then would come the ordeal for our love.

Ispenlove. Then would you prefer to stay here through all the divorce business and brazen it out?

Carlotta. No.

Ispenlove. It would be frightful.

Carlotta. It would.

Ispenlove. Well, there's no other alternative.

Carlotta. Yes, there is another. [*Moving away from him.*]

Ispenlove [*with hope*]. What is it?

Carlotta [*quietly but impressively*]. We can resist temptation. We can give each other up,

now, this afternoon. You can return to your wife. We can both of us prove to our friends—yes, and to ourselves—that there may be something splendid in the soul stronger than sexual love. Do you know what it is? Fortitude!

Ispenlove [*with abandonment*]. I cannot! I cannot! . . . I've kissed you!

Carlotta [*with an appealing, protesting gesture*]. You cannot? You say you love and yet you cannot endure?

[*Enter suddenly Miss Palmer, L., from the bow-doir. She stops undecided at the door.*]

Carlotta. Come in, Miss Palmer, come in.

Miss Palmer [*shutting the door, very disturbed*]. I just wanted a word with you.

Carlotta. What is it?

Miss Palmer. If you could spare a moment—now!

Carlotta [*after a moment's hesitation*]. Mr. Ispenlove, will you come in again later on—say in an hour—a couple of hours—before dinner?

Ispenlove. But——

Carlotta [*firmly*]. If you wouldn't mind.

Ispenlove [*weakly*]. Certainly, Miss Peel.

Carlotta [*with a bright smile*]. Au revoir, then.

[*Exit Ispenlove, in silence, R.*]

Carlotta [*sharply*]. Now, Emmeline, what on earth is the matter?

Miss Palmer. Mrs. Ispenlove is here. She came straight to the boudoir.

Carlotta [startled]. But Mrs. Ispenlove left not long since.

Miss Palmer [still very calmly]. She's come back. And she wants to see you alone. She wouldn't rest till I came in to see whether they'd all gone. I don't know what it is.

Carlotta [going to the door, L.] Is that you, Mrs. Ispenlove? Please do come in. I'm all alone.

[Enter Mrs. Ispenlove, L. Exit Miss Palmer, L.]

Mrs. Ispenlove. Carlotta! *[Carlotta makes no reply.]* Here I am disturbing you! I hoped you'd be alone when I called before. I couldn't help trying again. No one will come in?

Carlotta [soothingly]. We won't let anyone come in. Do sit down. Here, smell this. *[Hands her a Mackenzie smelling bottle. They both sit.]*

Mrs. Ispenlove. You're very kind. I need kindness. That's why I came.

Carlotta. Tell me—what can I do?

Mrs. Ispenlove. You can't do anything, my dear. Only I was obliged to talk to some one, after all the night. It's about Frank.

Carlotta. Mr. Ispenlove!

Mrs. Ispenlove. Yes. He's left me—yesterday. He hasn't been to the office. I had a sort of idea I might see him here, but I might have known he wouldn't be at any place where I

should be likely to go. [*Pause. Carlotta says nothing.*] I agree there's nothing to be said. But I do want you to understand. You can't understand unless I begin a long time ago. Oh, Carlotta! How beautiful you are—like that! You're so young! It's over twenty years since I fell in love.

Carlotta. With—Frank?

Mrs. Ispenlove. No. With another man. He was a young barrister, just starting. I was living with my father; my mother was dead. I think everybody knew I had fallen in love with him. I'm sure *he* did. We saw a lot of each other. Some people even said it was a match, and that I was throwing myself away, because father had money. Fancy throwing myself away—me! Then I met Frank—Frank was younger than me—and Frank went mad about me, and he had father on his side. I wouldn't listen. I didn't give him a chance to say anything. This state of things went on for a long time. It wasn't my fault. It wasn't anybody's fault.

Carlotta. Just so.

Mrs. Ispenlove. The man I was in love with came nearer. He was decidedly tempted. I thought I was sure of him. All I wanted was to be his wife—whether he loved me much or little. Then he drew away, scarcely ever came to the house. And then one day I saw a paragraph in the *Morning Post* saying he was going to marry

a woman of title, a widow and the daughter of a peer. He'd done it to get on. She was nearly twice his age.

Carlotta. What a shame!

Mrs. Ispenlove. Ah, my dear! I couldn't blame him. He didn't love me. But he nearly killed me.

Carlotta. And then?

Mrs. Ispenlove. Frank was so persevering. And I couldn't help admiring Frank's character. What woman could? I refused him, and then I married him. He was as mad for me as I was mad for the other one. . . . But I couldn't forget the other one, and Frank knew all about him, of course. He was never mentioned between us, but he was always there—always, always—every day of the fifteen years of our marriage. We did our best, but it was no use. We were helpless, Frank and I, because you know we aren't the sort of people to go and make a scandal—at least, that was what I thought. I know differently now. Well, he died the day before yesterday.

Carlotta. Who?

Mrs. Ispenlove. The other one. Cramp-horne. He'd just been made a judge. He was the youngest judge on the Bench.

Carlotta [*with an inflection of disdain and surprise*]. Was *that* the man?

Mrs. Ispenlove [*nods*]. Frank came in yesterday for lunch, and after he'd glanced at the

paper he said, "By the way, Cramphorne's dead." Just like that. I didn't grasp it. Frank repeated: "Cramphorne—he's dead." I burst into tears. I tried to stop crying, but I couldn't. I sobbed. Frank was furious. He said, "I know you've always been in love with the brute, but you needn't make such a damn fuss over him!" That made me angry. We had a scene. We both lost our tempers. Oh, it was terrible! One of the servants came in— [*A pause.*]

Carlotta. Yes?

Mrs. Ispenlove. Nothing. He's left me. He didn't come *home* last night. He said he'd never enter the house again, and he won't.

Carlotta. Then you love your husband—now? [*Pause.*] Do you? Tell me honestly.

Mrs. Ispenlove. Honestly? Honestly? No, if I loved Frank I couldn't have been so upset about Cramphorne. But we've been together so long. We're husband and wife. We got on pretty well considering—until lately, though he hasn't been so nice this last six months. I always tried to be a good wife to him. . . . Think of the scandal! A separation at my age. It's unthinkable. . . . Carlotta, my married life has been awful—awful, for both of us. But we hid it. No one knew. . . . And now——

Carlotta I knew.

Mrs. Ispenlove [*startled*]. How did you know?

Carlotta. Frank told me.

Mrs. Ispenlove [*pained*]. He'd no right to do so.

Carlotta. Yes, he had. [*On an impulse.*] Oh, Mrs. Ispenlove, I'm terribly sorry, but Frank's in love with me.

Mrs. Ispenlove. He's— [*Pause.*] So that's it! [*Pause.*] And I never guessed. [*She laughs and rises. Sarcastically.*] Of course you advised him to resist temptation.

Carlotta. I did.

Mrs. Ispenlove. Of course!

Carlotta. He's just been here. I sent him away so that I could see you.

Mrs. Ispenlove [*indignant*]. And this is how you tell me! [*Moving about.*]

Carlotta [*appealingly*]. How *was* I to tell you? I just had to be honest with you. Do try and put yourself in my place for a moment.

Mrs. Ispenlove. In your place! [*She stops in front of the photograph.*] I suppose you'll hide that now—or burn it.

Carlotta. What do you mean?

Mrs. Ispenlove [*losing control of herself; with an angry gesture towards the photograph of Diaz.*] He was your first! Do you think I never guessed? I've seen it plain on your face time after time. Why else do you keep it there? I always knew you were a bad woman. Anybody can see what *you* are in every line you write. . . . I expect it was you who drove him to morphine.

[She picks up the photograph idly, and then drops it flat on the piano.]

Carlotta. Morphine? Who?

Mrs. Ispenlove. Why! Diaz. Didn't you know that if he doesn't play any more nowadays it's because he's a hopeless morphinomaniac? Don't tell me!

Carlotta. How do you know he's a——

Mrs. Ispenlove [*resuming control of herself*]. I know because I saw him myself at the Grand Hotel when I went to Paris with Frank last month for the Copyright Congress. He's living there—unless they've turned him out. All Paris knew about him, and he hadn't a friend—naturally. Not a friend! Good afternoon, Miss Peel. [*Breaking down near the door.*] Oh, Carlotta! You'll regret this! What have I got to live for? [*Exit R.*]

[Carlotta goes to the piano, looks at the photograph as it lies, and sets it upright again on the piano. Next she goes to the writing-desk and sits down and takes a sheet of note-paper. Then, after an impatient movement, rises and goes to door L., and opens it.]

Carlotta. Emmeline, where's my pen? Bring it me, please. [*She resumes seat at desk.*]

[Enter Miss Palmer with pen.]

Carlotta [*taking pen*]. Thanks. That's all. [*Exit Miss Palmer, at back. Carlotta, after hesitations, writes. Enter Ispenlove.*]

Ispenlove [*disturbing Carlotta*]. You are free now? . . . Miss Palmer told me I might come in.

Carlotta [*starting up*]. Is this your idea of an hour—two hours?

Ispenlove [*excited*]. Carlotta, I came back to tell you—we ought to leave London to-night. We must leave to-night. More delay would kill me. Never mind packing. Let's catch the 8.40 train at Victoria. I shall have no rest till we're on our way.

Carlotta [*as if dazed*]. Train? What train?

Ispenlove. For Paris, of course. I can easily arrange my business from there.

Carlotta [*with emotion*]. Paris!

Ispenlove. After Paris—anywhere you like.

Carlotta. I was just writing to you.

Ispenlove. Writing? But why?

Carlotta [*handing him the notepaper*]. I didn't intend to see you again. . . . Read what I've written.

[*Ispenlove reads. A pause. Carlotta sits down.*]

Ispenlove [*dropping the paper on a chair*]. But this is a repetition of what you said to me when I went out just now.

Carlotta. Yes.

Ispenlove. Then you were serious—about me going back to my wife, and—and about showing fortitude and all that sort of thing? You really meant it?

Carlotta. I did.

Ispenlove [*in despair*]. You don't love me—never did! You were only sorry for me—when you let me kiss you. If you'd been in love you'd never have talked about love being an illusion. You simply couldn't. I might have known. I did know—all the time. You don't love me.

Carlotta. Frank, I'm awfully fond of you. I am, really. . . . It's terrible to me to see you like this. But——

Ispenlove. I don't care whether you love me or whether you don't love me. I'll be satisfied with pity if I can't get anything else. Have pity on me! . . . No! You won't. You won't. You'll never change your mind. I know you.

Carlotta. I can't go with you. It wouldn't be right. It would be worse than anything.

Ispenlove. You're thinking of your reputation.

Carlotta [*with an outburst*]. My reputation? Me? [*Calming herself*.] And supposing I am?

Ispenlove. Well, this is the end for me.

Carlotta. No, no!

Ispenlove. Do you know what I decided when I first came here this afternoon? I decided that if you refused me, if you even judged me, I should go to the office and shoot myself.

Carlotta. But you won't.

Ispenlove. I shall. There's nothing else for it.

Carlotta. You ought not to talk like that. It's not fair, and it won't do any good.

Ispenlove. I know it's not fair, and I know it won't do any good. . . . But that's the point I've got to.

[*In silence he moves towards the door. Enter Miss Palmer quickly, L.*]

Miss Palmer [calmly]. Oh, Mr. Ispenlove! Please come! It's a policeman. Mrs. Ispenlove's been under a motor-bus. She ran right in front of it, the policeman says. She must have lost her head. The 'bus knocked her down, but the wheels didn't touch her, and she's not hurt. They've got her at the chemist's round the corner. Our hall-porter saw the crowd and went along, and he knew Mrs. Ispenlove had just been here. Please do come at once. [*Ispenlove makes no reply.*]

Carlotta. Run and tell the policeman Mr. Ispenlove will come instantly. Run!

[*Exit Miss Palmer, R. A pause.*]

Ispenlove [quickly]. Then it was my wife who persuaded you to throw me over?

Carlotta. Frank, *you* must have pity—on both of us. Go and take her home. She's tried to kill herself—and failed. [*Ispenlove starts.*] You were in love with her when I was a girl at school. She was everything to you once, and she is still alive. Good-bye.

Ispenlove [at the door, bitterly]. You let me

kiss you—and then you thought of your precious reputation.

[*Carlotta drops her head. Exit Ispenlove, R.*

Carlotta takes up the photograph again and kisses it. Enter Miss Palmer, R.]

Miss Palmer. Oh, Miss Peel! What a mercy she wasn't hurt!

Carlotta. You're sure she isn't?

Miss Palmer. The hall-porter says she was sitting on a chair in the chemist's shop and crying. The reaction, I suppose.

Carlotta. I have to go to Paris to-night.

Miss Palmer. To-night?

Carlotta. Yes.

Miss Palmer. Alone?

Carlotta. Yes.

CURTAIN.

ACT III

The salon of a furnished flat in a dubious street of Paris. Doors back and R. The former almost wide open, showing a little entrance-hall with the front door of the flat. The door R. leads to a bedroom. The window is not seen. The furniture is pretentious and ugly, and shows signs of wear. A table in the middle. A man's hat hangs behind the inner door. The scene must be set shallow.

TIME : *Early afternoon.*

Two days have elapsed.

[*Diaz is alone, wandering about the room. There is a ring at the front door. He goes into the ante-chamber, opens the front door cautiously, and lets in Carlotta. He then shuts the front door with a mysterious and determined air. He motions Carlotta to enter the room. She obeys, apprehensive. He follows her, and shuts the inner door.*]

Carlotta [with ingratiating softness of tone, looking around]. Then it is you! [*She holds out her hand.*]

Diaz [inimically]. Oh! So you're English, are you?

Carlotta [*overpowered*]. Don't you remember me?

Diaz. Who the devil are you?

Carlotta. I'm Magdalen.

Diaz. Magdalen! Magdalen! [*Laughs.*]
Which one, I wonder.

Carlotta [*weakly, after a pause*]. Don't you remember that night after the concert?

Diaz. After the concert! After the concert! You might think I'd given only one concert in my life. What do you want here? What did you come for?

Carlotta. I came—to see you.

Diaz. Well, you see me. What else?

Carlotta. I thought you'd like to meet me again. I thought you were lonely and I might—help you—somehow.

Diaz. Oh, that's it, is it? Well, sit down.
[*She sits. Diaz remains standing.*] I'm just in the mood to talk to people like you. How did you get my address?

Carlotta. I——

Diaz. Now answer me. How did you get my address? Did you get it from the Grand Hotel?

Carlotta. Yes.

Diaz.—And I suppose they told you they'd turned me out?

Carlotta. They said——

Diaz. Did they tell you they'd turned me out—or didn't they?

Carlotta. They said they'd suggested that you might prefer a private lodging.

Diaz. It's a lie. They didn't suggest any such thing. On the contrary, when I informed them I wouldn't stand their awful hotel a day longer, they begged me to stay on. Of course it's simply a fortune to any hotel to have Emilio Diaz among its guests. I left because I chose to leave. Now you may think that this isn't much of a place. You may think, for example, that this room isn't furnished in the best taste. But I like it, and what's it got to do with you, after all? When I want your opinions I'll ask for them. This place was offered to me by a kind friend. You'd probably sniff at her. But she never asks me for money and she's the one friend that remains. *She* hasn't anything to do with the persecution. . . . At least I think she hasn't. I can't be absolutely sure.

Carlotta. Persecution? What do you mean?

Diaz. Good! Good! That's pretty fair acting. So you'll make out you didn't know I was being persecuted?

Carlotta. I certainly hadn't the slightest idea.

Diaz [*sneeringly*]. Naturally you hadn't! Therefore I'll give you a few interesting details. You're no doubt aware that I'm what's called a morphinomaniac. . . . Speak up! Speak up! . . . Never heard the word morphine mentioned in connection with me? Yes or no?

Carlotta. Yes.

Diaz. Ah! I knew I should drag it out of you! [*With violent and positive sincerity.*] Well, it's a disgraceful slander! A disgraceful slander! I was very ill a long time ago, and after my illness I did take a little morphine, strictly under doctor's orders. But I've taken none for years. None! Do you understand me? Not a solitary injection! I've been suffering from neurasthenia—pure nervous debility. And how was that brought on. [*Quietly.*] It was brought on partly of course by overwork. The whole world knows how I have worked. [*Loudly.*] But it was brought on much more by this persecution, this damnable plot against me.

Carlotta. But who—?

Diaz [*stopping her; mysteriously*]. Ah! . . . Ah! . . . I know him! I've traced him! Practically, my evidence is complete. Anyhow, it will be, to-morrow—or next week at latest. I have him. . . . You guess his motive. Who wouldn't? Professional jealousy, of course! He was afraid. His audiences were lessening, lessening. He was never a first-class pianist, but he was a first-class scoundrel—that I'll admit. He got hold of the fact that I used to take a little morphine. And on that he built everything. First he bribed the critics. There was a most remarkable change in my notices. Then audiences began to fall away. Then it was the concert agents who turned

against me. Every one of 'em. Then I couldn't even hire a hall. Think of it! Couldn't even hire a hall! Me! Then he actually got me thrown out of the Grand Hotel. That was the climax. . . . But my neurasthenia is rapidly disappearing. I'm much better. I'm much stronger. Do I look neurasthenic?

Carlotta. No! You look quite strong.

Diaz. Don't I look like a master?

Carlotta. Yes.

Diaz [*imperiously*]. Master of what? Master of what? Say it!

Carlotta. Master of the piano.

Diaz. Ah! . . . And yet you're only acting, miss. I can see through you. You—and your employer. You imagine you're very clever, very subtle. But I've twigged the game. He knows I'm getting better of my neurasthenia. And he's afraid, he's trembling once more. There's a new plot brewing, and he's sent you here to spy out the land. I was sure of it the moment you came into the room.

Carlotta [*rising*]. Please, please don't think such a thing.

Diaz. Sit down! Sit down, I tell you! [*She sits. Calmly.*] Why, you silly woman, can't you see I've been playing with you? You're not really causing me the faintest anxiety. Do you suppose I should have confided to you all these secrets if I hadn't made up my mind in

advance to kill you? [*With excitement.*] You little thought——

Carlotta. Kill me?

Diaz [*taking a revolver from the drawer*]. Certainly. What else is there for me to do? . . . No, sit down. Don't move.

Carlotta. I shan't move. But please reflect——

Diaz [*gloatingly*]. You're frightened.

Carlotta. I'm not. But I've been the cause of a great deal of unhappiness, and I don't want to be the cause of any more.

Diaz. You won't be.

Carlotta. I shall if you shoot me. Just think what it will mean for you—*please!*

Diaz. Clever! Clever! But it won't help you, Magdalen! . . . [*As if recollecting.*] Magdalen? Magdalen? The mail-train.

Carlotta [*rising suddenly*]. Emilio!

[*Diaz shoots and misses her. The bullet breaks an ornament behind.*]

Diaz [*rushing away*]. I didn't mean to shoot! I didn't mean to shoot! [*Exit, R.*]

[*Carlotta looks round at what is smashed. Her emotion is obvious, and she does not know what to do next. Enter Rosalie, back, suddenly, in a state of excitement.*]

Rosalie. Mais qu'est ce qu'il y a donc? Qu'est ce qu'il y a . . . madame?

Carlotta. Er—nothing, I think.

Rosalie [*calmer*]. Ah! Madame is English.

Carlotta. Yes, madame.

Rosalie. I imagined to myself I did hear a revolver.

Carlotta. Yes, madame. It went off by accident. You see what it broke. Monsieur Diaz— You know Monsieur Diaz, madame?

Rosalie. Do I know him, madame? We are good friends—we are the best friends, since a long time. In my flat, Monsieur Diaz is at home. And I am at home in his. What would you?

Carlotta [*cautiously*]. Monsieur Diaz has just gone into the next room, madame.

Rosalie. Ah! When he returns he will be better.

Carlotta. What do you mean, madame?

Rosalie. Madame is without doubt an acquaintance of Monsieur's?

Carlotta. Yes, I am. But I hadn't seen him for many years.

Rosalie. Without indiscretion, madame, one may speak freely?

Carlotta. Certainly, madame.

Rosalie. Madame, you have been seriously agitated. That sees itself. I suppose, therefore, that you were some little surprised by the condition of Monsieur Diaz. You had the misfortune to arrive at the hour of one of his paroxysms.

Carlotta. Paroxysms? What——

Rosalie. You have not heard madame? He—*il se pique*. He gives himself injections. He is giving himself an injection now—at this moment. He is *morphinomane*.

Carlotta. But he assured me——

Rosalie. Naturally! They all do that. It is I who tell it to you. And God knows if I have not met a few of them in my life! It is a pity, eh? But what would you? We all have something. I, for example, I am not *morphinomane*. I have a health of iron. Never a pain. I drink, so to speak, nothing. I have money. I am still young. But I am mad. I recognise it. I am mad. Well, Monsieur Diaz—he pricks himself with morphine. It is an amiable vice, except on the bad days. Never have I encountered a man with so much charm, so much heart, and so distinguished! True, the morphine will kill him. But we shall all die. What would you?

Carlotta [*warmly*]. But he can be cured!

Rosalie [*with tranquillity*]. No, madame. Behold a little malady that cures itself never.

Carlotta [*still more warmly*]. But he must be cured!

Rosalie [*nonchalantly*]. As you please, madame. . . . Shall I go and see— [*With a gesture towards the door, R.*]

Carlotta. Just a moment, madame.

Rosalie. With pleasure, madame.

Carlotta. He lives here quite alone?

Rosalie. Quite alone.

Carlotta. But he has a servant?

Rosalie. Madame, he shares my charwoman. She comes here from ten to twelve. Then to my flat from twelve to three. You see that in my vocation it is impossible to rise early. I hide nothing from you, madame. Besides everybody knows it. It is I who found this furnished flat for Monsieur Diaz. My flat is on the same floor. It is all that is most convenient.

Carlotta. But his meals!

Rosalie. His meals? Let us see. His *petit déjeuner*, he takes it in bed—when he takes it. For the rest, he goes to a café-restaurant. Or sometimes he takes lunch in my flat with Madame Léonie and me. Léonie is my very dear friend, whom I love much. She has a room in my flat. When Monsieur Diaz comes, we are quite gay, we three, but in an intimate fashion. I have a beautiful pianola, with the best rolls—everything that is latest in waltzes. I adore the waltz, above all, the new varieties— Ah! English musical comedy! I am mad about it. There is nothing to compare with it. I always play the pianola for Diaz.

Carlotta. But you knew that Monsieur Diaz was a very celebrated pianist!

Rosalie [*nonchalantly*]. Truly? I had perhaps heard something about it. Indeed, it seems

to me that I remember, when I was young, I remember to see his name once on a street advertisement of a classical concert. But, you know, the classical concert—that is not my kind. My business is at the music-hall. Marigny Theatre in summer. Folies-Bergère in winter. I have no time for amusements.

Carlotta. But your friends—did they never tell you, madame?

Rosalie. Madame, I have many friends, because I am a good girl and everybody knows it. But I have never said the name of Diaz to my friends.

Carlotta. Why not, madame?

Rosalie [*with a slight trace of resentment*]. He asked me never to say his name. And one can count on me.

Carlotta. And nobody comes to see him?

Rosalie. Madame, you are the first. You see, this street—shall we say?—repels.

Carlotta. But how can you tell, madame, that I am the first? [*She begins to take off her gloves.*]

Rosalie [*with more resentment.*] I am at home all day, madame.

Carlotta. But at night?

Rosalie [*impatiently*]. Ah! At night, naturally I am not at home. I go to my regular music-hall. It is my existence. I am not like the others. I am a serious girl. Is not my English very good? Do not my friends make

me compliments every night on my English? As I say, I cannot answer for the evenings of Monsieur Diaz. If you insist— [*With a sudden change to extreme benevolence as Carlotta uncovers her left hand.*] Ah! madame—mademoiselle. I ask pardon. I perceive that mademoiselle has no ring. How content I am!

Carlotta. But why?

Rosalie. Ah, mademoiselle! In our profession it is the married women whom we have the best reason to fear. . . . How content I am! mademoiselle, you will pardon to me my mistake. I am perhaps too frank. I speak too much. That is my defect.

Carlotta. You have been most kind, madame. It is I who have been indiscreet. Will you tell me one more thing? Monsieur Diaz never leaves here?

Rosalie. He has not—up to now. Why should he? One is very well here. There is a balcony. True, in the great heats Paris is enervating. But Monsieur Diaz has not yet experienced the great heats. For myself, I never leave Paris.

Carlotta. Really!

Rosalie. Except to see my little boy—and that is only in the suburbs.

Carlotta. So you have a little boy?

Rosalie. Yes, he lives with my parents at Meudon. He is four years old.

Carlotta. You are very fond of him?

Rosalie. Fond! I adore him! And he loves me too. If he is naughty, one has only to tell him that he will make his leetle mummy ill, and he will be good at once. When one tells him to obey his grandfather because his grandfather provides him with food, he says bravely: "No, not grandfather; it is leetle mummy." Is it not strange he should know that I pay for him?

Carlotta. How nice! And you see him often?

Rosalie. No. Only once a month. I take him for a promenade. I run with him till we reach the woods, where I can have him to myself, alone. I avoid people. Nobody except my parents know that he is my child. One supposes that he is a nurse-child, received by my parents. But all the world will know now. Sunday last I went to Meudon with Léonie. Léonie wished to buy him some sweets at the grocer's. In the shop I asked him if he would like peppermints. "Yes," he answered. "Yes, who, young man?" the grocer corrected him. "Yes, leetle mummy," he replied loudly and bravely. The grocer understood. We all lowered our heads. . . . You, naturally, have no child, mademoiselle?

Carlotta.—No. How I envy you?

Rosalie. You must not. I have been so unhappy that I can never be as unhappy again. Nothing matters now. All I wish is to save

enough money to be able to live quietly in a little house in the country.

Carlotta. With your child.

Rosalie. My child will grow up and leave me. He will become a man and forget his little mummy.

Carlotta. Don't talk like that.

Rosalie [*roughly*]. Why not? Is it not true, then? Do you believe there is a difference between one man and another? They are all alike—all, all, all!

Carlotta. But surely you have some tender souvenir of your child's father.

Rosalie. Do I know who is my child's father? . . . [*Controlling herself and smiling lightly.*] But there! What would you. While hating all these gentlemen, we love them. They are beasts! Beasts! But we cannot do without them. What would you? [*In a low voice, moving towards door, R.*] Now I will see——

[*Enter Léonie, back.*]

Léonie [*at the door, in a confidential whisper, to Rosalie*]. Monsieur Chirac.

Rosalie. Monsieur Chirac. *Je m'en fiche.* Tell him to go.

Léonie. It is the nephew, not the uncle.

Rosalie. Ah! In that case, I come at once. Mademoiselle! [*She bows.*]

[*Exeunt Rosalie and Léonie, back.*]

[*Carlotta moves about, examining the room.*]

[*Enter Diaz, r.*]

Diaz [now quite calm and master of himself, but nervous]. You are not gone, then?

Carlotta [cheerfully and naturally]. I was just wondering how long you'd leave me by myself.

Diaz [very gloomily]. What are you going to say to me?

Carlotta. What about?

Diaz [picking up part of the broken article]. I nearly killed you.

Carlotta. Oh, you were really very wide indeed. Of course revolvers are dangerous. The man who invented them was extremely ill-advised. But there they are, and sometimes, I suppose, they will insist on going off by accident.

Diaz. Accident? But I said I should kill you.

Carlotta. Did you? You never meant it.

Diaz [with emotion]. I assure you I didn't.

Carlotta. I want no assurance.

Diaz. When I suddenly began to remember who you were—it came over me all at once—I didn't know what I was doing. I couldn't even feel the revolver in my hand.

Carlotta. What was it made you remember me in the end? [*She sits.*]

Diaz. Ah! Perhaps it was your carelessness about yourself.

Carlotta. Carelessness about myself?

Diaz. You didn't seem to mind at all what the consequences would be to *you* if I shot you. You were only concerned about the unpleasant results to *me*.

Carlotta. Don't let's talk any more about that accident. It's over.

Diaz. Why did you come to see me?

Carlotta. I've told you. I knew you were—lonely. And I thought perhaps I might be able to help you. I started off the very day I heard. You see, I was quite free. I'd no ties—no ties whatever. So I just came at once—and found you.

Diaz. It's too late.

Carlotta. It's not too late until one of us is dead.

Diaz. Ah, Magdalen, what made you run away like that—in the night? No trace! Nothing! It was terrible for me. I was in love with you. I couldn't believe you'd vanished altogether. For months afterwards I expected to hear from you. But not a word. And what could I do? I didn't know where you lived, or even your name. I didn't know anything about you except that you were wonderful, unique. Then at last I gave up. . . .

Carlotta. Forgive me. I alone was the sinner. I had too much pride and not enough faith. I was afraid of my miracle. I was a coward. I did well to call myself Magdalen!

Diaz. Then that's not your name? I always knew it wasn't. Why did you call yourself Magdalen? [*Carlotta shakes her head to signify that she doesn't know.*] What am I to call you?

Carlotta. My name is Carlotta Peel.

Diaz [*startled*]. What! Are you— [*Stops.*]

Carlotta. Oh, no! . . . At least not for you. Only for the public. Please don't speak of my books. For you I will be the woman and nothing else. I've come back—[*with meaning*] exactly as I left you. Forgive me. I know that everything might have been different if I'd had faith. But forgive me.

Diaz [*springing forward, and dropping on one knee at her feet*]. I? Forgive you? Do not destroy me with your generosity. [*Bares his arm and shows it to her.*] Look! Look!

Carlotta [*gazing at the arm*]. Have you hurt yourself?

Diaz. Yes, I've hurt myself. Those are the marks of the morphine needle. . . . Wounds. . . . Scores, hundreds of them! That's the latest. [*Pointing.*] I was simply telling you a lie when I said I never took morphine. See this room. This is where I live. This is what I've come to! I've not touched a piano for months. I have no piano. Think how I received you, how I raved—yet I believed every word while I was saying it. I needn't explain. You understand. Look at my clothes! Look at my face! Look at my eyes! I've never confessed to anybody before.

But I confess to you. I must. I wouldn't deceive you. I'm the result of morphine!

Carlotta [*with an assisting gesture, persuading him to rise*]. It was not your fault.

Diaz. What do you mean—it wasn't my fault? [*He sits.*]

Carlotta. You first took it under the advice of a doctor, after you'd been very ill.

Diaz. Do you remember me telling you—that night? Yes, *that's* true enough. And you know, it's a wonderful thing, morphine is. The effect of it is almost instantaneous. A single prick, that's all. One moment you're on the rack and in the most appalling torture, and the next moment you're off the rack and you haven't a pain left, and you feel equal to anything. It's an absolutely marvellous thing.

Carlotta. Only it has other consequences.

Diaz [*reflective*]. Yes.

Carlotta [*intimately*]. D'you know—it's very nice of you to talk to me as you are doing. I like it awfully. [*Casually.*] Now what I don't understand is, why you keep on taking the stuff. I suppose you could give it up if you wanted to?

Diaz [*with assurance*]. Of course I could. I could give it up to-morrow—any time.

Carlotta. Then why don't you?

Diaz [*judicially*]. To tell you the truth, for me to give it up would be a mistake. It's necessary to my health, and when I say health I include mental health. I have given it up more than

once. But I have been obliged to take to it again. When you came to-day, I had abstained for a long time. Think of the state I was in! Anything might have happened if I had not had the presence of mind to go instantly and give myself an injection. You must admit there was no alternative.

Carlotta. I won't admit it.

Diaz. That's because you're a woman.

Carlotta [*firmly*]. Yes, it is because I'm a woman. You live alone. You've always lived alone. It has been morphine or nothing. But I am here now, and I am the alternative. I will be your morphine. [*Softly.*] What do you say?

Diaz [*after a pause, breaking down*]. Don't! Don't! I'm telling you a lie when I say I can give it up. It's only boasting. I've got Crother's book on morphine. I know it by heart. I know the last delusion of the morphine-taker is that he can give it up whenever he chooses. I can't give it up. I've failed over and over again. I'm the victim. I'm hopeless. Thank heaven I still have money, and I can finish my life in comfort.

Carlotta. Then if you won't let me take the place of your morphine, morphine and I will share you between us.

Diaz. What do you mean?

Carlotta. Just that. [*Stands.*] Will you turn me out?

Diaz. You don't realise——

Carlotta. Realise? I perfectly realise. I

realise I left you because I was a coward. I realise I've come back. I realise that once you were one of the finest artists in the world, and that every pleasure and every delight was yours for the asking, and that there was no power greater than your power. [*With restrained scorn.*] And I realise that now you're a victim; you're broken; you're helpless; you've no future. Instead of exerting power, you're a slave, and your master is a drug, a miserable drop of something or other in a glass tube. I realise that you'll get worse and worse, and that in time you'll become almost obscene. I realise that I shall have to watch all this, and that you'll deceive me with odious little fibs and thumping lies, and make me frightfully unhappy, and ill-treat me, and rave at me, and make horrid accusations against me, and I realise that in the end you'll die and I shall bury you, and all the newspapers will remember you, rather contemptuously, for just one day, and then forget you forever. That's what I realise. Is it enough?

Diaz. Why do you scorn me?

Carlotta. I don't scorn you. You scorn yourself. I'm only showing you how well I realise what that self-scorn will lead to.

Diaz. You're an angel, but you're a devil too.

Carlotta. I'm neither an angel nor a devil. I'm the girl you took and transformed into a woman. You said you loved her.

Diaz [*still seated*]. Magdalen, go away. It's

no use. I could never face the public again.

Carlotta. And why not?

Diaz. People would laugh.

Carlotta. Nobody would laugh. The public is the faithfullest thing on earth. You were born a great artist and you'll always be one. You'll die a great artist if you die in a ditch. The rest is nothing but practice. You'll say you're out of practice. Well, you would get into practice, that's all. You'd make your reappearance after a long illness, and your reappearance would be the most distinguished musical event that ever happened. People would stand out in the street all night to be sure of hearing you. When you came on to the platform the applause would be tremendous. It would unnerve you. But you'd get over that, and in half an hour you'd be—Diaz again!

Diaz. Ah! But the months and months and months it would take. And in the meantime I should have to live. Magdalen, I've not come to the end of my lying. I said I had money. I haven't. It's all gone. I've come to the end of my resources.

Carlotta. You aren't at the end of mine.

Diaz. I couldn't live on a woman.

Carlotta [*angrily*]. If you expect me to answer that sort of silly sentimentalism you're mistaken. Why couldn't you live on a woman? [*More gently.*] Surely when it's a question of a career——

Diaz. And *your* career. What would happen to that?

Carlotta. You are *my* career.

Diaz [*in a new tone*]. Magdalen, be honest with me. Do you really believe I could be cured? Really? [*Stops her as she begins to speak.*] Now be careful. Look me in the face. Do you really believe I could be cured?

Carlotta. I do. It's my religion. I know you can be cured. You talk about Crother's book. I've read Crother's book, too. I once wrote a short story about morphine. The idea came into my head the very night you and I met, but I didn't use it for years. Of course you can be cured. Crother definitely states it. Hundreds have been cured. You are going to be cured. . . . You are going to cure yourself.

Diaz [*with resolution, rising*]. I will. [*Carlotta holds out her hand, which he takes.*] But you aren't going to leave me?

Carlotta [*quietly*]. Don't I belong to you? And don't you belong to me? You took me, but I also took you. You're mine. Come with me.

Diaz. Come? Where?

Carlotta. Come away. Away from here. [*Picking up her gloves.*]

Diaz. Now? I can't come now.

Carlotta [*persuasively and naturally*]. Why not? There's your hat. You don't want anything else. We'll buy everything. We're going to begin again.

Diaz. But I've got a few belongings here.

Carlotta. Have you got the key of the flat in your pocket?

Diaz [*as if hypnotised*]. Yes.

Carlotta. Then we'll send for the belongings. [*Syren-like.*] Come with me. [*She takes his hat, which is hanging behind the inner door, gives it to him, opens the door and holds it open for him.*]

Diaz [*moving back a little*]. I must say good-bye to some friends on this floor. It won't take a moment.

Carlotta. No, no! [*Pause. Then gently.*] We haven't that moment to spare, Emilio. And you're mine. [*Diaz approaches her.*] Aren't you going to kiss me before we leave?

Diaz [*seizing her arms*]. I dared not.

Carlotta. Then who will dare if the master will not dare?

Diaz. Here, in this horrible room?

Carlotta. Where else? Here I found you. [*He kisses her. She returns his kiss with passion.*]

Carlotta [*in Diaz's arms*]. Good-bye, room. We shall never see you again. [*Looking at Diaz.*] Oh, I feel so weak!

Diaz. You've given your strength to me. [*Carlotta releases and stiffens herself, and with a firm gesture opens the outer door. At a sign from her Diaz goes out. She follows, and shuts the door behind her.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT IV

Same scene as Act II,

There is a small tray, with a glass and a decanter of wine on the piano.

TIME: *Between eight and nine at night.*

Fourteen months have elapsed.

[*Carlotta, in evening dress, with cloak, is putting on her gloves. Enter Miss Palmer, L, with a telegram.*]

Carlotta [*nervous, controlling herself*]. Open it, Emmeline.

Miss Palmer. Reply paid. [*Reading.*] "Awaiting answer as to proposed contract for new book. Urgent. Snyder."

Carlotta. Why doesn't he telephone, I wonder?

Miss Palmer. You know they haven't connected us up again yet.

Carlotta. Of course not. I was forgetting.

Miss Palmer. What am I to say?

Carlotta. Oh! Say "Regret cannot make any contract at present. Writing."

Miss Palmer [*patiently, protesting*]. Really?

You know you've never had such terms offered before. And Mr. Snyder must think it's very important, or he wouldn't have telegraphed so late. I expect he wants to catch the American mail to-morrow morning. He'll be disappointed.

Carlotta. Well, he must bravely force back his tears, that's all.

Miss Palmer. But——

Carlotta. Emmeline, how tiresome you are! For over a year I haven't had one single ghost of an idea for a novel. You seem to think I ought to be a machine for providing Mr. Snyder with ten per cent.

[*Enter Diaz, R., in evening dress.*]

Miss Palmer. Very good. [*She writes on the telegraph form at the piano. While writing.*] Mr. Diaz, the wine is there.

Diaz. No thanks. [*With determined gaiety.*] And who is Mr. Snyder?

Carlotta. He's my agent.

Diaz. Agent?

Carlotta. He looks after all my book contracts for me.

Diaz [*nonchalantly*]. Oh, I thought only music hall artistes and people like me had to employ agents.

[*Enter Snape, R., in evening dress, with overcoat; hat in hand.*]

Snape [*with suppressed excitement*]. The car's waiting.

Diaz [*calmly*]. Let it wait.

Snape [*looking at his watch*]. Eight ten. Concert begun.

Diaz. Snape, are you getting nervous in your old age? I should have thought the sight of those young virgins waiting outside the upper circle entrance at three o'clock this afternoon ought to have set you up for the rest of the day. [*Laughing easily.*] Such a thing's never been known at a Philharmonic concert before, I imagine.

[*Miss Palmer rings the bell.*]

Snape [*complying with Diaz's mood*]. Yes, there will be no spots on the audience. I've just been up there. Not room for another soul.

Diaz. I hope they'll find a corner for me. [*Snape laughs obsequiously.*]

Carlotta [*tactfully.*] Perhaps we *had* better be going.

Diaz [*still lightly*]. Now please do let it be generally understood—there's no chance of me being wanted before 8.45, and I have a most particular objection to waiting about in the artistes' room. [*Enter Parlourmaid, R. Diaz continues, as if addressing the company, including the hypnotised parlourmaid.*] I don't quite know what's the matter with everybody. I'm making my reappearance at a Philharmonic concert, than which nothing, even in heaven, could be more respectable. I'm playing Beethoven's Emperor

Concerto, because that is the latest piece of pianoforte music that the Philharmonic Society has ever really cared for. All the musical mummies in London, including the arch-mummies Sir Emil and Lady Steinberg, have crawled out of their coffins to hear me, and my intention is to put the fear of God into them. It won't be very difficult, and nobody need worry the least bit in the world. [*To the parlourmaid, comically.*] And you?

Parlourmaid. The bell rang, sir.

Miss Palmer [*who, during the foregoing speech has copied the telegram into her notebook.*] Please give this to the telegraph boy.

[*Exit Parlourmaid.*]

Diaz [*to Snape.*] By the way, did you write to the *Mercury* and refuse that interview?

Snape [*taken aback and recovering*]. I will do it.

Miss Palmer. Can I do it for you, Mr. Diaz?

Snape [*jealous*]. I'll see to it. I've not forgotten it.

Diaz [*teasingly*]. Look here, Snape, you'd better go down and cool your heated brow in the car. [*Exit Snape, r. Diaz continues, to Carlotta.*] It's a lucky thing for the esteemed Snape that I've put him on his legs again. He's aged. He's not the imperturbable paragon he used to be.

Carlotta [*tearing a glove; with a nervous*

movement.] Oh, dear! Miss Palmer, do run and get me another pair. You know where they are, don't you?

[*Exit Miss Palmer, L., swiftly but calmly.*]

Diaz [*looking at his photograph on the piano*].

Darling—a boon!

Carlotta. Yes?

Diaz [*with great persuasiveness*]. Do you specially want that photograph there? [*Pause. He goes on, feigning a childlike pout.*] I do so dislike seeing my own portrait about.

Carlotta. It's been just where it is ever since I took this flat. [*A silence.*] I'll have it moved. [*He kisses her.*] I'm sorry to keep you waiting. [*She drags off a glove.*]

Diaz. But you aren't. D'you know, I almost wish you weren't coming.

Carlotta [*struck.*] Why?

Diaz. I'm not nervous, but you might make me nervous.

Carlotta. Me! I—I thought you needed me. Don't you remember——

Diaz. I was very much all right at the rehearsal this morning, and rehearsals are apt to be ticklish things. . . . You see, I oughtn't to count always on you. I've got to be independent.

Carlotta. But *to-night*—! [*A silence.*] Yes I quite see. I won't go. I hadn't thought of it

like that. [*A silence.*] You'll come back to me instantly you've played?

Diaz. Two minutes in the car. [*Looking at the clock.*] In an hour—less than an hour—I shall be here again. [*Picks up his hat and overcoat.*] Well—I'll go down and put Snape out of his misery.

Carlotta [*embracing him fondly; in a whisper*]. I can't stop my heart from going with you. [*Exit Diaz, R. Carlotta removes her cloak and sits down. Enter Miss Palmer, with gloves.*]

Miss Palmer. Here they are.

Carlotta. So sorry! I shan't want them now. I'm not going.

Miss Palmer [*calmly surprised*]. Not to the concert?

Carlotta. No. I don't feel equal to it.

Miss Palmer. Mr. Diaz has gone?

Carlotta. Yes.

Miss Palmer. Have you got a headache?

Carlotta. No.

Miss Palmer. Well, in that case can you give me a couple of minutes? Because there are one or two little things that ought to be looked into. I hate to trouble you, but——

Carlotta. Certainly, what is it? It's been such a rush since I came back.

Miss Palmer. I don't believe in putting off.

Carlotta. Neither do I. But I haven't been here a week yet.

Miss Palmer. Eight days.

Carlotta. All right. Eight days.

Miss Palmer. Finance.

Carlotta. Well, finance.

Miss Palmer [*taking slip from notebook*]. Here's the total of what I've spent at the flat during the fourteen months you've been away. Including wages, but of course not including my salary or the rent.

Carlotta [*refusing the offered slip*]. How much is it?

Miss Palmer. One forty-nine—eleven—six.

Carlotta. Miraculous, Emmeline! I hope you don't want me to praise your economy—because words simply will not do it.

Miss Palmer. I only want you to understand clearly that if the bank balance is very low it's not my fault in any way.

Carlotta. So the bank balance is very low.

Miss Palmer. I told you this morning what it was. You see, while you've been away [*glancing at book*] you've apparently spent——

Carlotta [*with humorous mock solemnity, hiding her state of nerves*]. Emmeline, do you want to hear a piercing shriek? Because if you don't, don't exasperate me with any more figures.

Miss Palmer [*quite calmly*]. Very well. But what are you going to do? There's practically nothing coming in from books. Mr. Snyder

thought Ispenlove's last account was very disappointing, and the next will be worse.

Carlotta [*who has risen and put Diaz's portrait in a drawer and sat down again*]. Have you heard how Mrs. Ispenlove is lately?

Miss Palmer [*surprised*]. Me! Mrs. Ispenlove! No, why should I hear?

Carlotta. Mrs. Ispenlove hasn't called by any chance, since I came back?

Miss Palmer. No. [*With a certain emphasis.*] Nobody's called. As I was saying, there's nothing coming in from your books, and you won't make a contract for a new novel.

Carlotta. What about my private income? It used to keep up a household larger than this in the Five Towns.

Miss Palmer. Oh, I've no doubt. But the Five Towns isn't London. Seven hundred a year or a trifle under won't go far in these mansions.

Carlotta. Well, I must sell a security.

Miss Palmer. Thank you. I merely wished for instructions. [*Beginning again.*] Now, I've found out already that the new cook is very extravagant.

Carlotta. She's worse than that. She's narrow-minded. Sauté potatoes six times in three days seems to me almost bigoted.

Miss Palmer. And as the housemaid hinted to me to-night that the parlourmaid intends to give notice to-morrow, I think you might as well

get rid of the lot at the end of the fortnight. There's nothing like a clean sweep.

Carlotta. Oh, I rather liked the parlourmaid. What's her grievance?

Miss Palmer. It seems she says she understood you were a single lady.

Carlotta. The housemaid told you that?

Miss Palmer. Yes.

Carlotta. And what did you say to the housemaid?

Miss Palmer. I didn't say anything. I should never think of discussing you with anybody—much less servants.

Carlotta. And that's all?

Miss Palmer. Yes. It seems she keeps on saying every morning while she's brushing Mr. Diaz's clothes that she understood you were a single lady.

Carlotta. Ah! But I'm not! I'm not!

Miss Palmer [*quite calmly*]. Then that was my mistake. I told her you were. I'd no idea you'd got married while you were away.

Carlotta. I haven't got married, and I'm not single. I never considered your feelings when I brought Mr. Diaz to this flat.

Miss Palmer. Miss Peel, we know what servants are, of course, but I hope you don't imagine I'm like them.

Carlotta. But what do *you* think of it all?

Miss Palmer. I think it's no business of mine. I've always been quite happy with you.

Carlotta. Have you ever been in love?

Miss Palmer. No.

Carlotta. Will you ever be?

Miss Palmer. I don't expect to be. But of course one can't answer for the future.

Carlotta. Emmeline, I could shake you! I could tear you to pieces! [*Miss Palmer hooks the notebook to her belt.*] I wonder whether it's better to be a woman like you or to be a woman like me.

Miss Palmer. I really don't know. There's a good deal to be said on both sides.

Carlotta. Don't you comprehend I'm in agony to-night?

Miss Palmer. I know you're very upset, and I wish I could do something, but I don't exactly see what.

Carlotta. I was obliged to bring Mr. Diaz here! He's been very, very ill. I've nursed him. Not a physical illness—worse.

Miss Palmer. Yes.

Carlotta. He's cured. At least I think he's cured, but everything depends on to-night! Everything! If he has a success, a big success, all is well. If he doesn't—! And I'm sitting here! He wouldn't let me go with him. He daren't! He daren't! Of course he seemed very cool and cheerful to you, but it was all

pretence. *I* know what he felt like. [*She shudders.*] At the last moment he daren't let me go with him. And so here I am—and in a few minutes he'll be playing.

Miss Palmer. Then you'll soon know.

Carlotta [*standing up*]. Emmeline, you must go to the concert—this instant.

Miss Palmer. But I'm not dressed.

Carlotta. Put on my cloak and keep it on. Here's the ticket. Take a taxi. No, you mustn't have my cloak. [*Snatching it away from her.*] He might think it was me. You've got one of your own. The very moment the applause is finished drive back and tell me. You'll get here first, and then if it's not a success I shall know what to say to him when he comes. *I must* know how it went before he has to tell me! *I must!* And I can rely on you, can't I, not to come home with a fairy-tale.

Miss Palmer [*quite calmly*]. Most decidedly.
[*Exit Miss Palmer, R. The door remains open and conversation is heard. Re-enter Miss Palmer.*]

Mrs. Palmer. Here's a lady wants to see Mr. Diaz.

Carlotta. Now please don't waste time standing there.

Miss Palmer. But——

Carlotta [*scarcely able to control herself*]. Oh! Tell her to come in here. I'll settle it.

Miss Palmer [*to parlourmaid, off, as she herself disappears*]. Show the lady in, please.

[*Exit Miss Palmer, R. Enter Rosalie, R.*]

Rosalie [*startled*]. It is you!

Carlotta [*equally startled, after a moment*].

Yes. . . . But didn't you expect to find me here?

Rosalie [*stiffly*]. No, mademoiselle. But I might have known it.

Carlotta [*stiffly*]. What do you mean, madame—you might have known it?

Rosalie. What I mean? In truth it is a little difficult— [*Stops.*]

Carlotta. Will you sit down? This is my home. [*They sit.*]

Rosalie. Ah! In effect!

Carlotta. So you have come to London, madame?

Rosalie. Since three months, mademoiselle. My knowledge of English, all that I had heard of London, made me to think that perhaps London would have for me some advantages over Paris. And veritably, it was so.

Carlotta. And so you found out this address? [*With excessive smiling urbanity.*] How did you discover it?

Rosalie. Mademoiselle, it is perhaps best to be frank.

Carlotta. Always.

Rosalie. Among my new friends there is a young musician—*violoniste*. He is mad about

music—and about me. He makes part of the *orchestre* of Queen's Hall. He spoke of Diaz, with enthusiasm. He was all excited. From what appears, Diaz is going to play with *orchestre* at Queen's Hall. I do not understand those things, but without doubt you know. It is a long time since I heard the name of Diaz. "Well," I say to my *violoniste*. "You have the address of Diaz?" "Why?" he says. "Does that regard you?" I say; and I say again, "Have you the address of Diaz?" He says "No." "You cannot have it for me?" I say. He says "No." "Then you do not love me," I say; "and it is finished between you and me." Then he has me the address within the twenty-four hours. How? I ask not. The address is here. I come to see my old friend.

Carlotta. He is not here.

Rosalie. Where is he, mademoiselle?

Carlotta. He is playing at a concert.

Rosalie. Then it is to-night? . . . At what hour will he return?

Carlotta. I do not know, madame

Rosalie. But he will return?

Carlotta. How can I tell madame?

Rosalie. But he inhabits here?

Carlotta. Madame, this flat is mine. I have lived here alone for a number of years.

Rosalie. Nevertheless, at present you entertain Diaz here?

Carlotta. [*dropping her urbanity*]. I must

really protest. What has all this got to do with you? I don't know you.

Rosalie [rising, angry, and losing her self-control]. How! You do not know me? What this has to do with me? But it has everything to do with me. I know Monsieur Diaz in Paris. He is poor. He has a vice. He is not celebrated. Or if he is celebrated I do not know it. While loving him, I am also his mother. I find for him a home. I pay the rent. I give him often food. Yes, and I give him also money. I give him of the money which I have received from others. Why do I thus act? It is because I am mad about him, as the *violoniste* about me. If Diaz had been rich there would have been no others. I should have given myself entirely to him. It was my dream. But he was poor. It is necessary to live. And so—there were others. Then—you arrive. I suspect nothing. I was sure of Diaz, quite sure. Besides, I liked you. You were *sympathique* to me. You recall to yourself our interview. . . . One called me away. The exigencies of the profession—what would you? I return. Gone! I ask the *concierge*. No word! That night—nothing! Next day—nothing! I wait. Nothing! Nothing! Vanished! Disappeared! I resign myself—what would you? But I had the heart torn. Then after a year, more than a year, I am in London and one tells me the name of Diaz. After all, he is celebrated. I go to find him. It

is you that I find. Naturally it is you that I find! I ought to have known it, but truly I am too simple. I put questions to you about Diaz, and you reply—what has it to do with me?

Carlotta. Madame, I assure you——

Rosalie. You steal what is mine, and then you permit yourself to protest against my curiosity. You are a woman of society. There are some who would call me *cocotte*. *Eh, bien!* I like better to be that than *femme du monde*. All we others say the same thing, and we are right.

Carlotta. Will you listen to me, please.

Rosalie. You are with him? Say.

Carlotta. I have never left him from that day to this.

Rosalie. He could not have forgotten me. He was not capable of an infamy. Therefore he wrote to me, and you, who never left him, suppressed his letters. And since he received no answer from me, he said to himself, “She is only a *cocotte*. She forgets quickly”—I who was mad about him. Is it not true you suppressed his letter?

Carlotta. I did what you would have done in my place.

Rosalie. Ah! [*Rather at a loss.*] You believe that? You——

Carlotta. Will you please listen?

Rosalie [*sitting*]. It seems to me that I do nothing else.

Carlotta. You said to me in Paris that he could not be cured.

Rosalie. Of the morphine? And I say it again. He could not. Never!

Carlotta. So you still think so. Well, he is cured.

Rosalie. You make illusions for yourself.

Carlotta. Nevertheless, he is cured—absolutely.

Rosalie. And how?

Carlotta. He cured himself.

Rosalie. Tell that to another.

Carlotta. If you prefer it, I cured him. From that day when I saw you, to this, he has never had morphine.

Rosalie. How do you know?

Carlotta [*quietly confident.*] You may believe me.

Rosalie. But how do you know? You said you never left him. What did you mean?

Carlotta. For the first three months he was never out of my sight, night or day. You understand—never.

Rosalie. But it must have been formidable—
[*pronouncing in the French way the second time*]
formidable!

Carlotta. Possibly.

Rosalie. Tell me! Tell me the details of it! That interests me enormously, passionately.

Carlotta [*shaking her head*]. No. I shall never tell anybody.

Rosalie. But I can imagine it to myself. The frightful scenes! The terror! The vileness! The humiliations! Ah! The humiliations! . . . You locked the door. He would dispute to you the key. He would fight. He would beat you, screaming. [*A pause. Carlotta looks at her steadily.*] But did you not give him a little dose, a very little dose at the commencement? And then less and less?

Carlotta. No, I did not.

Rosalie. Did you not deceive him with injections of water? It is the customary method.

Carlotta. No, I did not.

Rosalie. *Eh bien*, there is no need to tell me. I know something of all that, myself. It must have been revolting, horrible!

Carlotta. It succeeded.

Rosalie [*gently*]. Who knows?

Carlotta [*matter-of-fact*]. I know. He plays now better than ever he played. No, he could not do that. But he plays as well as ever he played—and he was the greatest pianist in the world. The rehearsals have been splendid. To-night he takes up his career again. To-morrow morning all the newspapers in London, Paris, New York, Chicago, Berlin, Boston—they will be talking about him. At this very moment he is playing.

Rosalie. And you are here? You are not at the concert?

Carlotta. No, I didn't go to the concert.

Rosalie. You didn't go! Oh, England—what an island! What an island!

Carlotta. Now I've explained to you, madame, I hope——

Rosalie. Pardon me, mademoiselle, there remains a mystery. When I had the pleasure to meet you in Paris, you told me then that you had not seen Diaz since many years. It could not have been the truth.

Carlotta. Yes, it was quite true. Seven years. Eight years.

Rosalie. Then there had been letters.

Carlotta. No. Nothing.

Rosalie. What! Nothing happens in eight years, and then suddenly you come, you take him away, in a quarter of an hour, and you never leave him? Not possible!

Carlotta. Madame, it is quite simple. When I was a young girl I gave myself to him, and the next day I left him—because I lacked faith. It was a mistake. It was a crime. All his misfortunes came after that. When I met him again, I was determined not to make the same error. I owed him my confidence, and I gave it. I took care not to lack faith a second time. You did not believe that he could be cured; but I believed.

Rosalie. I begin to suspect that after all you English women comprehend love—what it is.

Carlotta [*with an appeal*]. Let me beg you—I feel sure you are good-natured——

Rosalie [*curtly*]. No! No compliments, please. . . . I will go. I go now. I leave him to you. [*Rising.*]

Carlotta [*rising eagerly*]. Yes, I knew you were good-natured.

Rosalie [*harshly*]. But I do it not for you. Ah, no! I do it for him.

Carlotta. We're alike in that. What I have done was for him.

Rosalie. But you have not given him up. You keep him.

Carlotta. Yes, that's true. It just happens so.

Rosalie. It also happens that my society would not be very good for him. I will hide nothing from you, mademoiselle—I too have taken to morphine in my turn. What would you?

Carlotta. Oh, I *am* so sorry.

Rosalie. Why? I like it. I adore it. It is my luxury. Never would I permit myself to be cured! Ah! Cured of that? No! . . . Mademoiselle, will you tell him that I have not forgotten him? [*Carlotta looks at her.*] No, do not tell him. Possibly I flatter myself, but it might disturb him. Adieu, mademoiselle. [*She turns away.*]

Carlotta. Madame, before you go, how is your little boy? He must be getting quite big.

Rosalie [*facing her*]. He is dead—since four months.

Carlotta. Dead?

Rosalie. Do not regard me like that. I wear no mourning because we others must not wear mourning. It is necessary to live and to be gay.

Carlotta. Madame!

Rosalie [*savagely*]. Do you think that if my little boy had not died I would have given you Diaz? Never. I gave him to you only because my spirit is broken. [*Weakly.*] Life is unjust. What have I done? Everybody will tell you that I am a good girl. Good-bye! [*She hurries out R., crying.*]

Exit Carlotta, R., following Rosalie.

Enter Snape, L., with slow, rather agitated diffidence. He looks about.

Re-enter Carlotta, R., weakly. At sight of Snape she becomes alert and braces herself.

Carlotta [*highly nervous and apprehensive*]. What is the matter? What are you doing here, Mr. Snape?

Snape. I hardly know.

Carlotta. Why are you always so mysterious?

Snape [*simply and gently*]. But I'm not mysterious, Miss Peel. I wandered in.

Carlotta. You didn't come in by the front door. I've just been there.

Snape. Yes, I came in by the front door about three minutes ago, but I went round into the boudoir because I heard voices in this room.

Carlotta. But why in God's name aren't you at the concert?

Snape. That's just what I thought I'd better tell you. . . . He sent me away.

Carlotta. What do you mean—he sent you away? Did he tell you to come back here?

Snape. He didn't tell me to go anywhere. When we got to the hall we found the programme was late. . . . I don't know why. . . . The conductor had just come into the artistes' room to fetch What's-her-name, the soprano. He was in a hurry, and he told Mr. Diaz the concerto wouldn't be on for half an hour. Mr. Diaz was very angry. He said he would *not* wait. He said the order of the programme must be changed. . . . Well, it was! The soprano had to give way, and the Casse-Noisette had to give way, and the conductor went on to the platform to make an explanation. . . . Our friend—followed him. . . . Nerves . . . of course.

Carlotta. But I never heard of such a thing.

Snape. Oh, I've *heard* of such a thing, but I never actually saw it before.

Carlotta. And couldn't you use your influence?

Snape. I did what I could. . . . But I was only cursed for having insisted on getting there

too early. I reasoned. I protested. . . . At last he said: "Leave the hall, Snape. Leave it altogether." He was furious. He shook.

Carlotta [*sarcastically*]. And you obeyed.

Snape. I am not the man I was. I had appalling scenes with our friend before he dismissed me some years ago. And since then—! [*A gesture.*] What could I do? I wandered here.

Carlotta. But if he was in such a state he can't possibly do himself justice! He can't possibly!

Snape. He cannot.

Carlotta. I ought to have gone with him and stayed in the artistes' room.

Snape. Assuredly.

Carlotta. But then he didn't want me to go with him, and if I'd insisted it would have made him worse.

Snape. Assuredly.

Carlotta [*with sudden decision, putting on her cloak*]. I must go to him. I must go to him. If he has left the hall before I get there I shall come back here immediately. You stay where you are.

Snape. I prefer that.

[*As Carlotta goes towards the door, enter Miss Palmer, R.*]

Carlotta. Well?

Miss Palmer. It's all over.

Carlotta. How did he play?

Miss Palmer. I didn't hear him.

Carlotta. Didn't hear him?

Miss Palmer. It had begun before I got there, and the doorkeeper wouldn't let anybody into the auditorium till it was finished. You know how they are. So I stood outside and looked through the glass. I could hear the orchestra, of course—it was very noisy indeed—but scarcely anything of the piano. [*Quietly taking her gloves off.*] As soon as it was finished they let me in.

Carlotta. But the applause?

Miss Palmer. Enthusiastic. Very enthusiastic.

Carlotta. Terrific?

Miss Palmer [*calmly*]. Yes, I suppose it was. Mr. Diaz kept walking off and coming on again, and shaking his head.

Carlotta. But didn't he smile?

Miss Palmer. I really couldn't tell you.

Carlotta. But surely you must have seen.

Miss Palmer. There was so much excitement. A lot of people—women—standing round the platform, cheering, and so on.

Carlotta. Did they get on to the platform?

Miss Palmer. No—it was too high. Then Lady Steinberg pushed past me. She said to some one that she was going to the artistes' room.

Snape. That settles it. [*He tries to perform a pirouette.*]

Carlotta. Was there an encore?

Miss Palmer. I don't know. When I came away Mr. Diaz was still walking off and coming

on again and shaking his head. You told me to come back as quickly as I could, didn't you?
[She moves away, L.]

Carlotta. Where are you going?

Miss Palmer. I'm just going to put the cover on the parrot's cage before I forget. Everything's so upset to-night. *[Exit, L.]*

Carlotta [with a nervous laugh]. She's an angel, but one of these days she'll be the death of me.

Snape. Me too.

Carlotta. Then it was a tremendous success?

Snape [nodding gloriously several times]. Otherwise Lady Steinberg would never have left her seat. In—incredible man!

Carlotta. Go and look after him. Go and look after him.

Exit Snape with celerity, R. Carlotta, with an inarticulate sound and a gesture of utter exhaustion, falls into an easy chair, and hides her face.

Enter Diaz, R. He comes in very quietly and calmly, with an eye on Carlotta. After a moment, as he approaches, she hears him and shows her face, without, however, changing her almost recumbent posture of exhaustion.

Diaz [somewhat self-conscious]. Well, it's over—and it's all right. *[He drops his hat and muffler on a chair.]*

Carlotta [*somewhat self-conscious*]. I knew it would be all right.

He bends down to kiss her, and as he does so she raises her face to his, and throws her arms round his neck.

Diaz [*more naturally and freely*]. They insisted on an encore.

Carlotta [*lightly*]. What did you give?

Diaz. I didn't give anything. I insisted they shouldn't have an encore. Why should they have an encore?

Carlotta. But surely, darling——

Diaz. The fact is [*with faint humour*] strictly between ourselves, I couldn't quite trust myself for an encore. I was afraid I might come to the end of my nerve before I came to the end of the encore. After all, I've been through something to-night.

Carlotta [*dreamily*]. Yes. [*She takes his hand.*]

Diaz. Everything was against me. A most ridiculous scene when I got into the artistes' room! They wanted me to hang about for over half an hour. I wouldn't. Snape lost his head; I had to send him away. I was angry. However, he was waiting on the landing, very apologetic, when I got out of the lift here just now, so I benevolently forgave him and he's gone home quite happy. . . . Yes, I'm glad now that I stuck to the Beethoven idea. Anyhow I've knocked on

the head the silly notion that I can only play Chopin. I fancy I've thrown some new light on the Emperor Concerto for them. And I must say they admitted it—handsomely, very handsomely.

Carlotta. Then it was a triumph.

Diaz. It was as great a triumph as I've ever had.

Carlotta. Really?

Diaz. Really. I'm not in the slightest degree subject to any illusions about the effect of my own playing. I never have been, and I wasn't to-night. I always said the thing could be done. . . . Well, it's been done.

Carlotta. I do wish I'd been there.

Diaz. So do I, in one way. And yet I'm glad you weren't. It was safer. I looked at your empty seat, and although you weren't in it, I could see you all the same.

[*Carlotta jumps up and kisses him.*]

Diaz. You haven't taken your cloak off.

Carlotta. As far as that goes, you haven't taken your overcoat off.

Diaz [*self-conscious again. The key of the scene changes*]. No. I've got to go out again for a while.

Carlotta. Go out? Now?

Diaz. Lady Steinberg's making a night of it. Reception or something. She came round and asked me to look in. In fact she wanted to carry me off with her there and then. However, I was

determined to see you first, so I said I'd appear later on. I thought I'd better go. *You* understand what the Steinberg woman is in our business. No one can lift a finger in London without her. You see, more or less, everybody will be there, and if I show myself everybody'll know there's been no deception about to-night's affair. It will fix me definitely for the future. I expect I shan't be more than an hour or so. You don't mind, do you?

Carlotta [*evenly*]. Of course not.

Diaz [*absently picking up his hat*]. I could take you with me, but it might seem— [*With a gesture.*] You never know! . . . I'm looking at it from your point of view.

Carlotta. Oh, I shouldn't dream of going. [*She takes off her cloak. He helps her.*]

Diaz. Shall you be up when I come back?

Carlotta [*sweetly*]. I don't know. I may be. But I give no guarantee.

Diaz [*casually*]. Well—what about finding a plot for your new book?

Carlotta. My new book! What new book?

Diaz. Aren't you *ever* going to write another? I shouldn't like you to drop novels altogether, my dearest. It wouldn't be good for you.

Carlotta. No, it wouldn't, would it? I must rummage into my mind. I haven't looked into the dark corners of my mind for ever so long.

Diaz [*smiling*]. Do . . . Well——

[*He kisses her hand, and then picks up his hat. She gives a little wave to him. Exit Diaz, R., When he has gone Carlotta falls forward with her head and arms on the piano. She is heard sobbing. Re-enter Diaz, R., quickly and rather noisily.*]

Diaz. My muffler! [*He stands still, then rushes to Carlotta.*] *Carline!* [*He pulls her towards him and looks her in the face.*] What is it?

Carlotta [*limply, but mastering her tears, and making an effort to smile*]. My poor boy! It's very wicked of you [*a sob*] to forget your muffler. [*She smiles for an instant comically.*]

Diaz. Carline, you're upset because I'm leaving you alone. I'm most frightfully sorry, I am really, but I assure you——

Carlotta [*as before, putting her hand over his mouth, and gazing into his face*]. No, no! I won't hear it. You're a g-g-great artist—again. And—g-g-great artists must not apologize. Don't you remember I said to you—that night—that artists like you were autocrats.

Diaz. I remember, but I must confess my——

Carlotta [*as before, stopping his mouth again*]. It is I who had better confess. I'm incorrigible. Nine years ago—the day after that night—I didn't trust you. I'd no faith. And now I find I've learnt nothing and I'm at it again.

Diaz [*low*]. At what?

Carlotta [*still between humour and emotion*]. Not trusting you. You ought really to send me to a hospital for incurables. . . . I put the photograph away—and I thought I was putting the original away. I wanted to put myself away too [*sob*]*—only the drawer was too small. And then when you told me not to go to the concert I thought, “He’s afraid of me becoming one of his—bad habits, and he’s trying to break himself.”* [*With her hand she again stops Diaz from speaking.*] And when you began to talk about my next novel I thought, “His idea is to find me a little gentle ladylike occupation so that the days won’t be too long for me and I shan’t worry him.” And, and [*sob*] fourthly and lastly—when you rushed off to Lady Steinberg’s it seemed as if there’d been a competition between your career—and your *Carlotta*, and the career had got the first prize. I’d been backing it to beat the field for a year past, and yet when it won I felt quite—queer. Really, sometimes I’m just as irrational as a man. Have you noticed it? . . . Well, get your muffler and run off. I’ll wait. Darling, all my faith’s mysteriously come back. [*Diaz takes off his overcoat.*] What are you doing?

Diaz. I’m not going.

Carlotta. But you must. Be serious, my poor boy. This isn’t a play night. It’s a work night.

Diaz. I’m not going. And if all the future

depended on it, I'm not going. [*Pause. He turns suddenly away from her.*] Carline, you must take something. You must drink to our marriage.

Carlotta. Our marriage?

Diaz. Till to-night—I could not suggest it, could I?

Carlotta. I quite see that we can't continue to shock London indefinitely.

Diaz [*at the table where the tray is*]. There's only one glass.

Carlotta. Isn't it enough?

Diaz [*springing to her and seizing both her hands*]. You! . . . Do you imagine that I ever forget one thing?

Carlotta. What?

Diaz. You see this man and this artist standing in front of you. . . . You created him. He's all yours.

Carlotta [*dropping her head on his shoulder, with significance*]. He doesn't know his strength. [*Lightly.*] He's hurting my wrists dreadfully.

CURTAIN.



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